Rough Living

An Urban Survival Manual

Chris Damitio

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First Edition

The characters and events in this book are not fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is not coincidental and is intended by the author.

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Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank everyone that has helped me with a couch, a meal, or good advice.

Chris Damitio

Rough Living
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About this Book	11
The Art of Rough Living	14
So What is Rough Living	17
No Baba, No Bobo	18
The Call of the Road	20
What is your provocation?	21
What I like to carry- My Stuff…	27
Four ways to get what you want	30
Types of Tramping	32
Tarps in the trees	33
Afraid of the Dark?	38
Packing Heavy vs. Packing Light	40
Finding Shelter Couch Surfing to Tarpetecture	45
Shelters and Missions	46
Tarpetecture and Huttery	48
Trolls Under Bridges	50
Beach Bummin'	51

Hostels and Guesthouses 54

Hammocks 56

Couch Surfing 57

Urban Camping and Squatting 59

The Importance of Your Bed 61

Living in Vehicles 63

Cheap Vehicles I've Owned 67

Food: How to get the grinds 70

Cooking and Storing Food 77

A Quick Guide to Making a Fire 82

Rough Recipes 87

Cash: Coming up with Jack 140

The People of the Fire 153

People to Avoid 157

Entertainment, Recreation, and Leisure 162

Staying Positive and Clean 166

Worksheet 169

About the Author 173

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About this Book

This book is not intended for the homeless. It is not directed at street people. It is not a how to manual for people who want to live in public restrooms and beg for change. This is a book for people who don't seem to fit into the accepted paradigm. Let me illustrate with a well known fable.

Once upon a time there was an ant and a grasshopper. They both lived in a wonderful place filled with enjoyable activities and fulfilling opportunities. The grasshopper loved to play his fiddle, eat fresh fruit right off the vine, and dance in the moonlight. The ant, however, warned the grasshopper that winter would soon come and that he should follow the example of the ant. Meaning, he should forego the simple pleasures in life so that he could prepare for winter. The ant did this. Each day he woke up early, said goodbye to his family, and went to work. He stored up resources for them, so they could live through the winter. In the evening, he came home and went to sleep early so that he could wake up again in the morning and do it again. The grasshopper couldn't understand why the ant would do it.

"Come, play in the moonlight, there's plenty of food. Worry about winter when winter comes."

Of course the ant didn't listen, just as the grasshopper didn't listen to the ant.

Now, the way this story usually ends is the winter comes and the ant watches smugly from his warm house stocked with food as the grasshopper freezes and starves to death. I never liked that ant.

That's because I'm a grasshopper.

The truth is, the ants control the world. In doing so, they have been trying for a long time to turn all of us grasshoppers into ants. What I mean, is they

want us to produce, produce, produce and then consume, consume, consume. They want us to give up our pleasure in life and join them in drudgery so that they can feel like they are making the right decision. They want us to validate them by joining them, or they want to smugly look on as we freeze and starve to death. I say, nix to them.

I've rewritten the ending of the old fable. Here it is.

"You better get to work or you're going to freeze to death this winter," the ant told the grasshopper, ever so smugly.

"My life is my work," the grasshopper said. "You better take a second to enjoy your life or you're going to keel over prematurely of a coronary. You'll wake up one morning a very old ant and wonder why you never saw your kids grow into big red ants.don't worry about me, I'll be fine. You better worry about you though."

The ant continued working and the grasshopper continued playing his fiddle and dancing in the moonlight. In fact, the grasshopper had so much time to practice his fiddling and dancing, that he became a virtuoso!

When the winter came the ant waited hopefully to see the grasshopper freeze or to have him come begging for warmth or food. It didn't happen though. The grasshopper had enough time to learn where to get food and how to stay warm without the ant's help. He spent the winter entertaining friends with his fiddle playing and staying warm using creativity. When spring came around, he was just fine.

So this isn't a book for beggars. It's a book for those hardy souls who

choose not to be ants. It's a collection of a few of the things I've learned to get through the winter. It's a book for grasshoppers and ants that want to live like grasshoppers. I hope you enjoy it.

Chris Damitio

The Art of Rough Living

I am living like a prince. That's what I'm doing at the moment. It's great. Let me tell you what the life of a prince is like.

I slept as late as I wanted. I played tennis until late last night with my new friends from tennis class. It wasn't cold, because I am in the tropics. Hawaii actually. So anyway, I slept a little late. I woke up at about 10. After using one of my bathrooms to shave and brush my teeth, I went for a little breakfast. French toast, coffee, and Dutch apple pie. It's great to be a prince.

I took a brief walk through one of the gardens to my main library. I've been studying Japanese and wanted to look up a phrase I hadn't understood. While I was there I used the internet to check on the news, stocks, and of course, my horoscope.

I wanted to spend most of the day working on a novel I am writing but I also wanted to take a drive. So I drove to my other library on the other side of the island. After eating one of my favorite sandwiches for lunch (KimChee and Tunafish) in the garden and drinking some watermelon nectar, I settled down in the library and began the arduous task of self editing. Ouch.

Sounds pretty good right? It is. The thing is though, I'm no prince. I'm homeless. I'm just pretty good at living.

Let me translate. Last night I played tennis in a public park. I paid $25 for six group lessons and in the process made a lot of friends. Plus, if you live in your car, the hardest thing sometimes is figuring

out what to do at night. Tennis is a great option. My racket was $3 at the Salvation Army.

After tennis, I drove my car to one of my favorite parking spots. It's another park that allows all night parking. Lot's of scuba divers go there for night dives. I slept on the floor of the van I bought for $175. I was near Waikiki for a couple of reasons. 1) My tennis lessons were there and 2) I bought a ticket to Hawaii a while back because it's a great place to be homeless.

Another cool thing about Waikiki is Burger King. Right now they have those free food scratch off coupons on fry cartons and large drinks. Lot's of folks don't even peel em off. That's how I got the free French toast sticks and apple pie. The coffee cost me 87 cents.

After breakfast I walked through the capital district to the state library. I study Japanese in my car and in the parks. Why? It's good to have something productive to do. I choose not to work, it doesn't mean I don't want to learn. I have a library card so I get to use the internet for free.

I drove across the island because I keep my laptop (and my novel) in a storage unit on this side. It's cheaper for storage here. That way if someone breaks into my car, they don't get the laptop. I can't afford to get a new one. I got this one by trading a VW bus I bought for $100 for it. Not bad, huh? The gardens I stroll through are really public parks and I make my own lunches. So what did the life of a prince cost me today? Including gas? About $3.

It's all in how you look at it. Trust me, there are times that this lifestyle sucks. When I really want to have a shower and don't have one to just ump in, it sucks. When I get sick and want to lie in bed all day, it sucks. When I meet some beautiful chick that is only interested in the money she thinks I have and I break it to her that I live in my car, it sucks. But most of the time. It's not that bad.

The key is really in what you do with your time. If you are a

millionaire or a bum, you're probably going to be pretty miserable if you spend all your time drinking or drugging. Tennis is fun whether you have a home or not. Learning is fun.

So What is Rough Living

So, what the hell is this rough living? Rough living is making due without. Without whatever you might need or want at any given moment. Without food, without money, without shelter, without whatever it is you want immediately at hand. Rough living is spending your last dollar without knowing where the next one will come from. Rough living is also about the rewards that come from making it anyway.

The following is some of what I've learned and seen in my career as a vagabond. I hope the advice is useful, inspiring, and enjoyable to both vagabonds and armchair adventurers alike.

Chris Damitio

No Baba, No Bobo

My mom was working as a waitress and my dad was painting houses, playing music, and trying to raise my older brother and me. I was almost two and my brother was about seven. One evening Dad was watching us because Mom was working and he had no gig that evening. Mom and the baby sitter followed a similar routine in making me a bottle (ba-ba), ensuring that I had a pacifier (bo-bo), and then tucking me in my crib (night-night) before helping my brother with his homework. Dad threw all of that out the window and propped me on the couch watching TV while he helped my brother with his homework at the kitchen table.

It was at this point that I first heard the haunting melody of what might lie beyond. Obviously, I recognized that something lay outside better than what the talking heads on the magic box were babbling about. Dad's first clue was a whoosh of cold winter air blowing my brothers papers from the table. He looked up and realized that I was gone as the screen door slammed in the wind. He ran outside and was terrified to see that I was running down the road next to two busy lanes of nighttime traffic. He sprinted after me and though I ran as fast as my tiny legs would carry me he caught me as I attempted to dart between fast moving cars.

He picked me up and shook me asking, "Chris, what are you doing?"

It was only then that I spoke my first sentence as I tried to explain it to him. "No ba-ba, no bo-bo, no night-night, bye-bye." If I had been a bit more articulate I might have explained the call of the road like this "I'm pretty sure there's a better life out there for me somewhere".

I'm still pretty sure about that, although as I get older I start to think that maybe things are a little deeper than that. Possibly, it's that I've got to see what's out there so that I can appreciate what's been here all along.

Chris Damitio

The Call of the Road

Chances are, if you're reading this that you've felt the call of the road at some point in your existence. It's called me for as long as I can recall. The call of the road is irresistible and though I've tried to fight it, I'm eventually powerless to hold it at bay. I am seduced by the desire to see what lies beyond the bend or over the next ridge.

Rough living requires little, but a few things make your life a whole lot better. The first thing you absolutely have to have is a will to live. The sheer desire to survive. The will to live comes in many forms. Curiosity has kept this cat alive through some desperate times. For me, there is a need to know what is going to happen next. I have friends that have made it because they love their families. Still others live to fulfill some religious devotion. The important thing is that you refuse to die. Even when it seems like that would be the easiest course. Absolute refusal.

If you want to die, you won't survive a week of rough living. There are far too many ways to end up dead. So, first of all, if you want to learn some of the lessons and experience some of the joys of rough living, you need to want to live.

There is a philosophy to rough living. It’s an individual philosophy. Each person has to ask themselves what it is they want out of life.

What is your provocation?

I like that word. Provocation. A pro is an expert. A vocation is the way we make ends meet in the world. The word vocation is the same as the word vacation except for one letter… Seriously, you have to ask yourself what it is that you want in the world.

Are you seeking redemptive social change? A new plasma screen television? More time to be with your family? More time to be by yourself? What PROVOKES you to even consider rough living?

Is it that you want a revolution? Are you into shattering the social structure?

Unleash your desire. Grab hold of empowerment and listen to a suggestion from yourself. Be honest…what you seek is self determination and freedom.

Now, let's take a look at what you have to work with. It's what we all have to work with. It's the same for everyone but completely different. Or as they so charmingly say in Asia when languages are not in common…'same same but different'.

At this point, I want you to grab a sheet of paper. Divide it into three columns and label each one with one of the three A's.

To get what you want form life you have the three 'A's'. Abilities, accumulations, and access.

Abilities. Your abilities are what you can do. Can you build a house, unclog a drain, put up fences, dig ditches, paint, write, draw, garden, accessorize, fix things? What are your abilities. Never mind if you think you can make money with them or if you think they are useful. Your abilities are what you can do.

Accumulations. This is your stuff. Some people have lots of stuff, some people have no stuff. George Carlin has a funny bit about how a house is just a place to keep your stuff. Stuff can be helpful and it can be a hindrance. More on this later.

Access. Access is probably the most important thing you can have in our society. Did you ever notice that when you watch the credits of movies there are lots of the same names? Maybe you thought, “Wow, that’s coincidental” or “What a talented family!” Don’t kid yourself. That is what access can get you. Access is who you know and where you can go. A library card gives you access to books and computers. A father who is President of the U.S. gives you access to business ventures and politics. Honestly, is there even a remote chance in hell the George W. Bush would have become president if his father hadn’t provided him with plenty of access? That is what access can get you.

Take your time with this. When you think you are done, hold on to that paper. You’ll find that you can add a lot more to it as time goes on. Following is my simple example of a beginning.

Rough Living
An Urban Survival Manual

Abilities

Writing

Speaking

Computers

Driving

Guiding

Kayaking

Cooking

Hiking

Traveling

Digging

etc

Accumulation

1989 Minivan

$4.86

camp stove

laptop

books

sleep pad

website

camera

telephone

hibachi

etc

Access

Public library

Public parks

Restrooms

Coffee shops

Bars

Beaches

Hotels

Dollar movie

theatres

Internet

Friends houses

Streets

Etc.

You get the point, right? So let's get crazy and say I want to have a steak dinner with corn and a big glass of milk. Easy, right? I go to the grocery store, go to the reduced price meat section (more on this later), pick up a steak, an ear of corn, and a pint of milk. Then I go to the park, fire up the barbecue using hardwood sticks to get coals (you don't have to have charcoal from the store!) and I make my meal.

I can almost hear you though. "What if you don't have the $4.86 to get the groceries?" It's still easy. You may not get the immediate gratification of a steak dinner, but you can do it. Look at your list and see what you have to work with. Two quick examples should suffice….

Example 1: I go to the library and post on www.craigslist.com that I am offering rides from one part of town to another for $5 round trip. (I make sure that it doesn't cost me too much in gas of course) and wait for my phone to ring.

Example 2: I make a sign that says "Historic Walking Tours of such and such area", I go to the library, do a little research into some history of wherever I am living, learn a few facts, and I either go to a place where tourists gather (rest area, beach, park, etc) and share a part of my local scene with a visitor. I can either set a fee or wait for tips. If I choose to wait for tips, it's always a good idea to mention that I am working for free and that I live on my tips.

In all three cases, it is me, using my abilities, accumulations, and access to get a steak dinner with corn on the cob and a big glass of milk. I'm tempted to go on, but the fact of the matter is, my list is different than your list. Give it a try with your list. How do you get that steak dinner three different ways?

You want to make sure that you weigh the value of what you seek by the cost of what you desire. For example, it wouldn't be worth it for me to use $8 in gas to get a $5 meal.

Aim for the easiest, most convenient, and most fun way to get where you want to go. Instead of saying "I apply for a job, go through a lengthy interview process, get hired, work for two weeks, get my first check, cash it, and then go out for my dinner at Sizzler", I went with something more convenient , more fun, and more easy.

So flip your piece of paper over and write down a few things that you want. Leave plenty of room underneath so you can explore different ways to get it. Don't limit yourself to the physical side of things. There are plenty of other things we all want.

We all want to be safe, we want to explore, to search, to assimilate and to experiment.

How can you do some of that with what you have?

What I like to carry- My Stuff…

Not everyone that reads this book is going to live the way I do. Not everyone wants to. This is a very individual way of living. Here are three examples:

Cat Lady- I saw a lady in the park yesterday wearing a couple of taped together garbage bags for a dress. Obviously, she needs help. She had a couple of shopping carts strung together loaded to overflow with stuff. I was curious and got closer despite the terrible stench that surrounded her. I was amazed to see that this madwoman was carting around about ten cats in travel cages. Most of what she carried was cat food and cats. Obviously, she's a nutter.

Bag guy- There's another crazy homeless guy around here that carries dozens of plastic shopping bags loaded with all of his possessions. Seriously, this guy has dozens of bags. Why are homeless people so obsessed with having stuff?

Surf guy- I'm told that this guy used to be a world class surfer and had an accident that made him loopy. He seems to have a better idea of what is going on. He has a couple of pairs of board shorts, a duffel bag with some t shirts in it, and a rice bowl and spoon. Simple and easy.

What do you need? Do you need cats? Do you need knickknacks? More importantly, since I'm assuming most of us aren't crazy like the people above, what do you need with you?

As I said, it is a matter of personal preference. I'm almost never without a pocketknife, a lighter or matches, and a change of clothes. Add a blanket, a tarp, and a jacket, and I've got just about everything I need. One more essential is proper ID. Unfortunately, we live in a security conscious world and if you want to avoid hassles with the law having a passport, driver's license, and birth certificate helps keep you free to do what you want. These three pieces of ID will help you in other ways too. A sort of catch all thing I like to have is what fur trappers in the Pacific Northwest called the possibles bag.

The Knife: Everyone has his or her preferred blade. For me it is a medium sized Swiss army knife. Something that fits in my pocket but gives me a can opener, a couple of blades, a leather punch, tweezers, scissors and a screw driver. I have friends that prefer a good utility knife with a serrated edge, locking blade, and thumb lever. For anyone involved in commercial fishing this is the knife of choice. I've known a couple of guys that would be dead if they hadn't of had a one handed opening serrated edge to cut themselves out of tangled lines when they were dragged under while fishing in Alaska and the Arctic.

Lighter and/or matches: There's a few ways to light a fire. The easiest is to use matches or a lighter. You can also use your lighter to light a camp stove, light cigarettes, smoke pot, cut rope, melt plastic, and much more. Fire is too precious not to have available.

Change of clothes. You never know what sort of situation you are going to be in. It behooves you to have a clean and presentable set of clothes you can wear. Sure, you can smell like something the dog wants to roll in, you can wear the same jeans until they turn black from grease and dirt, but honestly, why would you want to? A clean set of clothes is easy to maintain and carry. If you need to, you can wash your clothes in a public washroom, go to the park, lay your

clothes around you in the sun, and then put them in your bag.

Jacket: Even if it's not cold where you are a lightweight jacket is worth carrying. I use a simple waterproof shell with a hood. It blocks the wind and keeps me dry. I can wear layers underneath if it's cold.

Blanket: A wool blanket will keep you warm even if it is wet. You can use it as a pillow, a poncho, roll it into a pack, and use it for a cushion, whatever. A good blanket has a thousand functions.

Tarp or groundcloth: A six-foot by six-foot tarp will keep you dry anywhere, it will keep your gear dry, it's light, it folds up small, and if you combine it with the tarps of friends it can become part of a communal tarpetecture structure. More on tarpetecture later.

Possibles Bag: The possibles bag is a small bag you can carry on your belt, in your pack, or somewhere on your person. Basically it is a bag that has gear in it to help you in any situation possible. My possibles bag typically has an extra pair of eyeglasses, dental floss, a lighter, my knife, a couple of band aids, and a pen and paper. Depending on where I am, the contents of my 'possibles' changes.

Chris Damitio

Four ways to get what you want

Buying

The easy way to get what you want is to buy it. Whether you are looking for food, shelter, love, or excitement; cash can get you most of what you need. I'm not knocking it, but buying is not my favorite way to get what I need and not just because I don't have a big wad of jack. That's probably a part of it though. It's just a lot more satisfying to come up with things in a more creative way.

Making

This is probably my favorite method of getting the essentials. It involves looking around at what you already have and then figuring out a way to make it into what you need. A monk I met in Thailand had this down to an art. He said, "First I look at what I have, then I figure out why it is exactly what I need." I'm not so enlightened as he is but I am pretty good at what the Marines call " adapt and overcome". Use your accumulations, abilities, and access to get what you desire.

Asking

This method is almost scary in it's effectiveness. You simply figure out exactly what it is that you want, who has it or can provide it, and then you ask for it. It has a lot to do with access. If you can ask the right person, your odds of success go up exponentially. There's no guarantee that it will work, but I've found it invaluable to get over my shyness or sense of the ridiculous and simply ask, "Can I have this muffin?" or whatever...you won't know until you try it.

Taking

I'm not proud of it, but I've done my share of taking. Il have tried to restrict my theft to what I truly needed or at the least to stealing things that hurt individuals little while stinging the big corporations. Sure, it's justification, but it feels better to know that the bank, the airlines, or their credit card company will reimburse someone. The problem with stealing is that you can never know the results of your action. What if you steal a bag and it drives someone to murder? Does that make you responsible for the murder? It's all too complex for me to think about. That's why I choose to get what I want in other ways. If you truly want to learn how to take things, I recommend Abbie Hoffman's "Steal This Book."

Specific Examples- Tobacco. Let's say you want a smoke and you don't have any money or cigarettes. What are you going to do? (You'll quit if you know what's good for you! That's what my friend the Thai monk would say.)

Buying- you walk into a store, give a clerk your money, and walk out with a smoke.

Making- you pick up cigarette butts on your stroll around the neighborhood and then smoke the tobacco from them in a cigarette you roll using a cigarette paper or a piece of newspaper.

Asking- you ask smokers you see "Can I bum a smoke?" until someone gives you one.

Taking- you steal the tobacco from a person or a store.

Chris Damitio

Types of Tramping

Like most vocations. There are a number of different ways to tramp or vagabond. Your needs are going to be different depending on where you are and what you spend your time doing. Like everything else we will talk about in this book. It's a matter of personal preference.

Tropical Tramping is definitely my preferred mode of rough living. The thing I like about it is the warmth of the water, the lack of necessary gear, and the variety of activities. Beach bums are what most of tropical tramps are called. It sounds almost respectable.

Temperate Tramping is pretty good. You have to do a little more preparing to tramp in a temperate area. You need a way to keep dry. For both you and your gear. You probably need blankets at night. You are going to have a little tougher time finding a place to bathe. It's all doable. It just requires a little more work.

Cold Weather Tramps work too hard in my opinion. Cold weather tramps have to have a shelter (or else they have to be tougher than they are crazy!). They have to have plenty of gear. They need to have fire on a regular basis. They need to eat enough calories to keep the body going strong. Again, it can be done, but why do it the hard way if you don't have to.

Rough Living
An Urban Survival Manual

Tarps in the trees

We drove out dirt roads and hiked up a well-worn trail. It was raining, a mist drifting through the giant trees. Suddenly, like Mirkwood, the far off tinkling of laughter came from up high. We took a wrong turn down a trail, backtracked, and finally wondered into the encampment. High above three log and tarp forts hung in the mist. Connected by ropes and pulleys. Banners hung between them proclaiming, “This Land is Our Land” and “Save our Forest.” There was no one on the ground.

There were signs of people all around. Rain gear, buckets (used to haul shit and piss), tarps, and even a mysterious tent with a smoking fire still going nearby. The people vanished into the wood. These people weren’t living rough, they were living primitive.

I gave a halloo up to the nearest tree fort. A male voice called down.

“Who is it?”

“It’s Chris, you don’t know me, but I’ve got food for Lucky.”

While we were eating breakfast in Eugene, our friend, The Ole’ Reptile, had asked if we would bring a bag of dog food out to the Fall River tree sit for a dog he knew was out there without proper food. We, of course, agreed.

“I’ll just leave the bag down here.”

“Great. Thank you.”

We continued to look around and examine the curious tarpetecture of the feral folk who live in and among the ancient Douglas Fir that were threatened by imminent logging. Random stick, shit bucket, and rope creations blocked the roads to keep trucks and vehicles from approaching. A large compost bin and what would probably become a garden occupied parts of the road. The

tinkling of laughter came from everywhere. Lightly. From nowhere. The tree sitters have their own culture. It was spooky how nobody came out to meet us. I was relieved when we left to return to Eugene.

These folks were going feral. There's a difference between what they do and what I do. These guys were trying to live like society didn't exist. I live knowing that it does.

Don't get me wrong. I have a lot of admiration for the folks who are able to go back to the woods. There is a fine art to getting off the grid, growing your own vegetables, and making everything you want regardless of society.

The problem is that as much as you might ignore society, society won't ignore you. That's why I live within society rather than trying to escape it. It's nearly impossible to escape. That's why the Fall River Tree Sit looked more like a camp under siege than a homestead.

The Junk of Society

A guy I know used to buy rejected textbooks from schools in Texas and sell them to other school districts that were still using them. That was giving him enough dough to support him and his family. But then, one day he was driving his pickup past an oil refinery and saw stacks of tools and equipment being carried out by the workers. Having an eye for value, he stopped and asked if they were throwing the stuff away. They said yes and when he asked if he could take it they said yes again. So, he loaded everything up in his truck and took it to a drilling supplier in Houston where he sold all of it for close to $90,000. True story.

You see, what was happening is that the big corporations work just like the government does. They operate on a concept called a fiscal year. All budgets run for one fiscal year (usually October to October.) At the end of the fiscal year, the Chief Financial Officer and his accountants figure out where they can slash budgets so they can put money elsewhere.

So, if individual departments have not maxed out their budgets, their budget gets smaller. To prevent this, departments will review their own budgets before the end of the fiscal year and figure out how to spend all the money they saved over the course of the year (and usually a little more.) A good for instance would be throwing away $90,000 worth of perfectly good tools.

Another ‘recycling’ tale that is worth the telling is the story of my friend Sam. Sam is a rug dealer from Chechnya who moved to

America about forty years ago. He moved into a cheap tenement apartment in Los Angeles and got a labor job. The building he was living in was condemned not long after he moved in but because so many poor people were living there the city allowed that those there could stay for a period of five years but no new tenants would be accepted. This left a lot of apartments empty over time.

Sam had noticed that people in America threw out all kinds of useful things and began picking stuff up on the way home from work each morning. Soon his apartment was full and he asked the manager if he could store things in some of the empty ones. The manager didn't seem to mind and so over the next few years Sam filled up most of the empty apartments with just about everything you can imagine.

At the end of the five years, the city took action to evict the last 15 residents, giving them one month to leave. Sam ran his own publicity campaign with the newspapers and television stations saying that he and the rest of the evicted had lived there for years and had no place to put all of their 'valuable antiques' and 'ancient family heirlooms.' He further complained about a city ordinance that forbids garage sales on the street in front of the building. He really worked the angle of evicted senior citizens and immigrants.

After lots of pressure from the public who read of the problem in their newspapers and saw stories about it on their local news, the city granted a special permit allowing the citizens of the building to have a special garage sale to sell off their valuables.

Sam tells me that for two days he and the other residents nearly continuously carried his accumulated trash downstairs and for ridiculously high prices sold it to the predators that were hoping to prey on the misfortune of these poor people. It was a three-day permit and at the end of the second day Sam had nearly $200,000 in

cash. He got spooked and left the rest of everything to the other residents.

He flew to the Caucus Mountains and bought a huge inventory of beautiful rugs and then returned to America where he sold the rugs and bought a small ranch and an RV with his legitimate profits. He still sells the rugs and he still picks through the garbage despite probably being a millionaire.

Chris Damitio

Afraid of the Dark?

One of the hard things about being houseless is dealing with the dark. I don't mean being afraid of the dark. I mean, what do you do when it gets dark?

In prehistoric times, I'm sure that communities of cavemen and women sat around the fire, used torches, made candles, and utilized them as soon as the sun went down. People still do that, all over the world. It's either that or go to bed.

The problem we have in being houseless is that we have to fly under the radar. Make no mistake. Society does not want to see us having a great time while they toil and trudge to the office 60 hours a week. That's the reason why the police routinely sweep through parks and areas where the homeless set up camps. If they see us having a decent time without the toil, it makes their blood boil. So even if you can scavenge up a decent little hut, make your own candles or set up a solar cell, and run plumbing to your cardboard shack; you can be sure that Joe Citizen will have John Law sweep through your little enclave and burn your corrugated castle to the ground.

So what are you supposed to do? You've got a few options.

1) Go to bed when it gets dark
2) Stay up all night and sleep all day out in the open. You can sit in Denny's reading and nursing that bottomless cup of coffee for at least a few hours.
3) Be stealthy. Use only as much light as you need and cover it

as much as possible.

An old military trick is to put a red lens on your flashlight to make it less visible to the enemy. It works. Within limits. Obviously you don't want to light up the hobo jungle with an eerie red light that will make Suzy Homemaker think of a Stephen King novel.

Push lights are cool but not very efficient. They take a couple of AA batteries and provide a small amount of soft light.

I prefer a small headlamp that directs the light where I want it and a keychain LED. Both can be bought at just about any outdoor or variety store. My LED keychain cost $8 and provides just enough light to find my way in the dark or find something in a dark van. I've used it to read, but prefer the white light of a headlamp instead.

I realize that some of this sounds paranoid, but like Abbie Hoffman said, just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they are not out to get you.

Chris Damitio

Packing Heavy vs. Packing Light

When I first started living this way, I moved from a house into a VW bus. I had tried to get rid of things but there was so much that I felt was necessary to my existence. I had three pots, two pans, a cheese grater, soup ladles, four sets of silverware (in case I had guests), plates, cups, folding chairs, books, books, and more books, framed pictures, knickknacks on the dash, art supplies, computer gadgets, a guitar, a fiddle, a harmonica, three different size packs, three pillows, four sets of sheets, ten changes of clothing, six sets of shoes, a dog, the dog's toys, the dog's pack, the dog's food, my food, electric razor, seven blankets, a camp stove, a backpacking stove, an icebox, an electric heater, auto tools, woodworking tools, metal tools, knickknacks, toiletries, and about fifty thousand other things. It all went in the car. It was an ordeal each night to clear out a place to sleep. Sometimes, I slept on top of things rather than move them at night so I could sleep and then move them back in the morning so I could drive.

The upside was I had just about everything I could possibly need or want. I would visit friends and they would be amazed when they would say off hand "It's too bad we don't have a croquet set!" and I would pull one out of my bus. Or when I made breakfast in the bus for a couple of friends and it turned out to be gourmet omelets with bacon, toast, and hot coffee. I made it in the parking lot of the radio station I worked at for my coworkers. They were sure surprised! It was fun, but what a pain in the ass. So let's look at the merits of packing light vs. packing heavy.

Rough Living
An Urban Survival Manual

Packing Light

Plenty of space

Easy to move

Not obvious

Limited functionalitiy

Requires creativity

Packing Heavy

Variety of Goods means lots of functionality

Takes lots of space

Looks obviously houseless

Hard to move

Limits your mobility

Okay, so in my biased survey…packing light wins. I admit it, I still carry around too much stuff but my list is smaller now. The rest of it

goes in a storage unit. Here is my current list. One burner stove, mess kit, coffee cup, food, blanket, knife, sleep pad, hammock, duffel bag of clothes, running shoes, flip flops, guitar, tennis racket, LED light, journal, and a couple of books. I also have a walkman radio and a couple of cheap tools to work on my car.

The key is this. If you carry something for a couple of weeks and you don't use it at all. Get rid of it.

What to do with your stuff

You can do lots of things with all that extra stuff you have. If you have furniture and bric a brac you can call a second hand junk dealer and have them come pick it up and give you a few bucks for it. This is assuming you still have a house, otherwise you can drop it off. They don't pay much, but it's certainly better than carting all that stuff around, right?

Maybe you would feel better donating it to charity though. You can drop off just about anything with the Salvation Army, Goodwill, and local thrift stores. Community Services for the Blind will pick things up at your house.

Maybe you have a bunch of things that hold family value. My advice is give that stuff to your family that has space for it. Either give it, loan it, or ask to store a few boxes of 'grandma's china' in Cousin Eldon's basement.

This brings us to storage. I use a $20 a month storage unit. I have a few things I eventually want to hang on walls when I have some. I have a few family heirlooms and a few things that are too valuable to me to get rid of. Storage is a good option if you find yourself in a similar situation. I prefer paying for storage to keeping things at a

friend or relative's house because I know that my storage unit isn't going to move, I'm the only one with access to it (because Cousin Eldon's kids might not know it's grandmas china and use it for slingshot practice), and because it's one less thing to think about.

Finding Shelter
Couch Surfing to Tarpetecture

You've gotta sleep somewhere. Vagabonds living on the edge of society develop a knack for having a secure place to sleep. There are a few key things to look for when you're seeking shelter. A good shelter protects you from the elements. It keeps your gear dry. It keeps your gear from going into someone else's hands. Most importantly, it protects you from the human predators that are definitely out there.

Chris Damitio

Shelters and Missions

I don't like homeless shelters or missions. I've visited them, but never bothered staying. I've talked with enough people who have to know that it's not for me. There is an underlying edge of violence and theft that seems to pervade such places. I'm not interested in hearing about God in exchange for a bed. In visiting, I've found that shelters seem to be places devoid of hope. There are many options that are much more appealing.

If you need to stay in a shelter or at a mission there are a few things you need to know. First you should find a way to safeguard your important things. If you are packing heavy with things you don't want to lose, find a place to stash them. Most shelters are filled with unsavory types that will go through your bag. Sure, you might think, but why would they want to steal from me, I'm poor too! Exactly. It's easier to prey on the poor than on the rich. If you have money, important papers, or credit cards, etc. keep them on your person at all times or ask the person running the shelter if there is a secure place to put them. As for the rest of your gear, keep an eye on it.

I don't mean to sound completely negative about shelters and missions. I've met plenty of good people that stayed in them because they needed to. It's a valuable service. You can make friends with these people once you are there. There is truth to the statement that there is safety in numbers.

If you are not a person of a religious nature or if you don't like having religion crammed down your throat, this might be a difficult

place for you to stay. Most of the missions and shelters are religiously based and they love to shove that religion down people's throats.

Chris Damitio

Tarpetecture and Huttery

If you hike at all, I'm sure you have come upon tarp structures that someone has built and abandoned in the woods. I really hate these. If you are going to build a camp using tarps, clean up after yourself.

There are a few things you need to figure out to make a tarp structure. You need to find a good spot, make it waterproof, and, if you want to stay a while, have it camouflaged.

My friend Kalalau Larry introduced me to the term tarpetecture. Larry is a modern day Viking. He paddles kayaks, makes mead from honey and water, bakes bread in the jungle, and spends about half of his time living in one of the remotest places on the planet. The Kalalau Valley on the island of Kauai. I was living in a VW bus on Kauai and Larry had built an incredible little shelter with tarps on the same vacant lot where I parked. You see when Larry isn't in Kalalau he works in the real world and stays comfortably invisible under his brown tarps. When he is in Kalalau, he lives under the brown tarps too. So tarpetecture is using a variety of tarps strung between trees, bushes, rocks, or frames to shelter you from the weather. Ideally, a good tarpetecture structure has geometric implications that are pleasant to the eye in addition to being functional.

Tarpetecture can be as simple as a lean-to or as complex as a bamboo dome. The key is using your tarp in the most effective way in the particular environment you find yourself in. I've seen tarps on sheds and even in giant trees.

My friend Aquillo Mallot, on the other hand, is a master of

creating cozy and comfortable huts in the Pacific Northwest. Huttery. I've seen him build huts from driftwood on the beach. I've seen him dig pits and cover them with fallen logs and tarps. He usually has a wood burning stove in his huts complete with flashing glued to the tarps the stove pipe goes through. Everything Aquillo gets is abandoned as garbage. He's used tarpetecture to make derelict fishing boats into landlocked huts after he uses scavenged ropes and pulleys to drag the wrecks on shore during low tide and patch them up. The only limit to what you can do is your own imagination. Aquillo is proof of that.

Chris Damitio

Trolls Under Bridges

If you spend any time traveling among the houseless you will definitely encounter some of the derelicts that live under various bridges all over the country. In my experience, they are a sorry lot that can't figure out how to keep the rain off their heads any other way. Bridges are noisy, dirty, and uncomfortable. The one bridge I would recommend visiting is in the Fremont District of Seattle. There is a real troll there, made of cement, and about to eat a VW bug. Other than that I would suggest that you find someplace else to keep dry.

Beach Bummin'

The savvy vagabond goes where the going is easy. Head to the beach. The beach can offer you fishing wrecks like Aquillo uses in the Northwest of the US or wonderful showering and bathroom facilities like you find in Hawaii and Southern California. Not only that, you can fish for food and entertainment, swim (if it's warm enough), and generally, you can have a fire on the sand provided your not in Waikiki or Laguna.

The Beach Tarp Roll 'burrito'. This is a great trick to have in your beach bum bag of tricks. Let's say that you are sleeping out under the stars and it starts to rain. No problem. You are already sleeping on a tarp because sleeping on the bare sand is cold and uncomfortable (it's true, sand gets everywhere.) So what do you do? You simply grab an edge of your tarp and roll yourself into a beach tarp roll burrito and stay dry until the storm passes. You don't even need to get up!

Showering is easy at the beach. Most marinas have showers available. A lot of public beaches have showers available too. If they don't you can always get a membership at the YMCA or 24 hour fitness. One thing you don't' want to do is let all that salt and sand accumulate on your body. It's an easy way to get rashes and begin to look like a real bum.

Bathrooms are placed strategically throughout most urban and metropolitan areas so that normal folks don't have to walk over the

leavings of the homeless. That's not the only reason the bathrooms are there, but it's a good one. Use public restrooms. Nobody wants to see you taking a leak or find your wadded up toilet paper in the woods. Including me. If you are in a place where there are no public restrooms look for a Walmart or Mcdonalds. They seem to be everywhere and they almost always have public restrooms. I think the best restrooms to use are the restrooms and stalls designed for handicapped people. They are bigger, cleaner, and generally the locks work. If you can't find that, well the chances are pretty good that you can probably find a discrete place to do your business. Please though, use a stick and bury your shit and shit paper.

I sometimes have people look at me funny when they come upon me shaving or brushing my teeth in the bathroom. No one has ever said anything about it. If they do, I have an answer ready.

"Would you rather have bums with good hygiene or bad?" I don't think there can be an answer of bad from anyone.

The sand can get everywhere. It will get in your food, your clothing, your car, your ears, your underwear, your butt crack. Rinse off well and don't forget to wash your feet.

Shelter from the Sun. If you are going to be outside all day, every day, don't forget to either use sunscreen or at least limit the amount of time you are in the sun. Schedule some time under a tree or in the library. Unless you want to be one of those ultra bronze old people with 28,000 liver spots all over your body.

Relaxing

If you are in a tropical climate it's easy to live on the beach. Simply cover yourself with a tarp if it seems like it might rain and you are

good as gold. If you are in the a little colder climate make sure you know how to build a fire. I'll give you a few hints later in the book.

Chris Damitio

Hostels and Guesthouses

My friend Kevin once told me that he no longer hangs out in bars because he has discovered that if you drink at a hostel it is cheaper, more fun, and you meet more interesting people. I agree completely. Hostels and guesthouses are also the poor traveler's means of staying in exotic destinations the world over. A guesthouse in Laos can cost as little as $1 US per night for a private room with a king size bed. A hostel in England will cost you about $20 US as opposed to spending a minimum of $50 at a fleabag hotel. Hostels and guesthouses exist just about everywhere. The people that stay at hostels are usually more approachable than the people that stay at hotels. They don't whine about inconveniences and you can usually find someone heading in your direction or willing to accompany you on whatever adventure you hanker. Hostels are great places to hook up with cheap tours, exciting adventures, cheap transport, and information about where you are heading next.

Most hostels provide communal kitchens you can store and cook your food in, activities, internet access, and more. In addition to that, if you come across as a somewhat normal person that is willing to work hard, you can usually find a bed at a hostel in exchange for your labor. The key to this is to be persistent and honest. Tell them what you want and offer your services in exchange.

Rough Living
An Urban Survival Manual

Chris Damitio

Hammocks

Hammocks are like a gift from the heavens for the houseless and bedless. I love my hammock. My buddy Jeremy gave it to me a couple of years ago and since then I've carted it with me everywhere I go. I've lived in it, I've relaxed in it, I've slept in it, I've eaten in it, I've made love in it, and I've hung it up all over the place.

My hammock is a "Ticket to the Moon" hammock. It folds up into a pouch about the size of a softball, is made out of parachute silk, and with two three foot loops of rope, I can hang it on nay two trees, posts, hooks or beams, that I have found yet.

If I have a hard time sleeping at night. I take it to the park and sleep in the morning or afternoon. I always hear people murmur "Gee, that looks great!" as they walk by. It is. Get a hammock.

A hammock makes the difference between people seeing a bum on the ground or a guy practicing the fine art of leisure.

Couch Surfing

Ben Franklin said, "Houseguests are like fish, they start smelling in three days." My friends are usually more tolerant. The key to staying at other people's pads is to remember that they are working to pay for their space. As a couch surfer you need to make sure you give your hosts their space. Some definite no no's are hogging the TV, not cleaning up after yourself, and basically occupying space without giving anything in return. Doing light chores will usually win the gratitude of your hosts. Things like washing the dirty dishes, vacuuming the floor, and cleaning the bathroom don't take you long but make you look good. Personally, I like to cook meals for my hosts. I'm a good cook with a knack for taking whatever is available and making it into something tasty. If you don't have the same gift you can never go wrong cooking eggs and toast in the morning. Breakfast is cheap and most people enjoy having it served in their home. Some of my favorite cheapskate gourmet recipes are included in the book.

The hardest part for me in couch surfing is dealing with the people that live there. Don't get me wrong. I am appreciative of what they are doing. It's just that I'm a little bit, ummm, *sensitive.* I start to feel guilty for taking up their space after a very short time. I think that because of that I project resentment from them towards me. Weird, huh? In some cases, that is it. In a few others, it's not me projecting at all. People want to help you, and that's nice. However, they start to resent you taking up their space. They don't want to be bad people and tell you to move on, they know you don't have anywhere else to go. That's when the passive aggressive behavior begins.

Chris Damitio

When I start experiencing passive aggressive behavior is when I would rather live in a doorway.

Urban Camping and Squatting

In a pinch you can do what I like to call urban camping. There are different variations depending on your circumstances. In a city like Portland, Oregon there are a lot of couches on a lot of covered porches. If you arrive late enough and leave early enough, these hospitable sites can be the perfect place to crash out. Once I was caught in a small Colorado town during a snowstorm and managed to stay warm by crawling under a 4x4 that pulled into a driveway at about 10 PM. The heat from the engine lasted long enough to get me through the worst of the storm. Urban camping can even be more traditional. I once camped on a park bench in Regent's Park across from Buckingham Palace in London, England for three nights in a row. As I lay there wrapped in my blanket, I had a recurring fantasy that the Queen was going to invite me to morning tea. She didn't. On that same trip to England, I set up a tent in some bushes in Epping Forest for a week. No one discovered me except a few dogs that came galloping in to see what was in the bushes and left in terror when they found me cooking sausages and beans. The key to being successful in this kind of urban camping is to find a spot that is invisible from roads or paths, has an inconspicuous entrance and/or exit, and that you are discreet in how you behave there. For example, fires are probably not a good idea in most cities but propane or sterno is probably fine if you need to cook something.

Squatting is a very different situation. In most American places they can bust you for breaking and entering if you take up residence in an abandoned building. My European friends tell me that the laws

are different there. One technique that I have used while hitching in the Southwest is to scout out houses that are for sale as I walk along an hour or so before sunset. If you can find one you are pretty sure is not occupied it's usually pretty easy to return after dark and jimmy open a back door or window. I prefer older, run down houses, as they usually don't have security. If breaking in to the house is too risky, you can usually find a porch, shed, or garage to get you out of sight and the elements.

The Importance of Your Bed

We spend one third of our lives in bed. We use our beds for sleep, romance, reading, and recovering when we are sick. If you have a bed, be very glad. If you don't have a regular bed, here are a few options.

The Bedroll. I've had lots of bedrolls. The basic bedroll is a tarp or groundcloth laid out flat, a wool blanket over that (or two if you are in the cold), and a foam pad on that. Fold the blankets and tarp around the pad, and roll it up. Unroll it when you have a good place to sleep.

If you have the space, the trifold cushions you can get at Walmart make great beds. Cusions of any sort can be great to sleep on. Foam is good but it collects moisture and can get heavy and cold. My favorite simple bed is my Thermarest. It has a self inflating bladder, rolls up small, and can be folded into a decent chair.

Sheets are important. If you have the space for them. I highly recommend sheets. The higher the thread count the softer the sheets. Soft sheets can make an uncomfortable bed feel wonderful. Same goes for pillows. Crappy pillows can cause a bad nights sleep on a million dollar bed.

Old curtains or material can easily be made into a blanket. The ideal size is at least 60" wide by 2 yards. I like to sew a footbox into the bottom.
Heavy-duty 33-gallon garbage bags can be used to make a ground cloth, a poncho, or a small tent.

Chris Damitio

Large ziplock bags filled with air make good pillows. A bunch of them makes a decent air mattress.

Rough Living
An Urban Survival Manual

Living in Vehicles

If you plan on living in your vehicle there are a few things to take into consideration. First, make sure that you can sleep comfortably in it. Pickups with camper shells, vans, and station wagons are your best bet. Second, make sure the vehicle is legal so that you don't get your home put in an impound yard. Third, pick your parking spaces carefully.

I've found that parking in secluded areas is almost always a mistake. The best places to park are places where there are people around and plenty of vehicles moving in and out all the time. I've parked in cul-de-sacs and had people report me to the police because it was "suspicious" to see a car parked there. Oddly, I've parked in residential neighborhoods where I didn't know a soul for weeks on end and no one thought anything of it. I suppose they all thought I knew someone they didn't know.

Of course, the best places to park are where you have friends. My friends in Seattle allowed me to park behind their house for months. It made them feel secure because my being there discouraged the local druggies from congregating and doing deals in the alley. I did yard work and helped out around the house to keep things nice for them and me. I've lived in three Volkswagen Buses in Alaska, Washington, Oregon, and Hawaii. In every case, not having to pay rent allowed me to live a life I otherwise wouldn't have been able to. With the money I saved on rent I was able to purchase airline tickets, train tickets, or just go out on a good bender.

Maintenance. If you live in your vehicle, you better pay attention to the maintenance. This doesn't just include oil, brakes, and tune ups. It also includes keeping your tabs current, your headlights good, and your insurance card up to date.

Legalities. Laws vary from place to place. As a for instance, here on Oahu, it is illegal to sleep in your vehicle from 6 PM to 6 AM. They call it habitation. The fine is actually larger than the fine for sleeping in the park. Know what the peculiar legalities are for where you are.

Localism. There are some places that you don't want to be. Parking in some neighborhoods is just plain dangerous. Not only might you wake up without your tires, you might not wake up at all. Know where you are parking.

Sleeping In. Sleeping in can be a problem when you live in your car. Think about where you are before you go to bed. Otherwise, you might wake up to a surprise. If you are parked in front of an elementary school it may be quiet at night, but what about when the kids arrive. The urban street might seem quiet until the disco opens at 10 PM. Last night, I actually went to sleep next to the remote control car racetrack. I woke up early.

Gas. Gas is expensive these days. The funny thing is, it can vary a lot in a short distance. There was a difference of 18 cents a gallon at two stations less than a mile from each other a few days ago. Try to save on gas. One good way to do this is to use the city bus if you find a good parking spot.

Getting Comfortable. Each car is going to be different. It's not so hard

for me to live in a car as I'm not a huge guy at five foot seven. Larger folks will have to figure out how to be comfortable if they want to live in their cars. Basicly, I just make sure I have space to move in my vehicles.

Being Inconspicuous. If you want to attract attention you can do it lots of ways. You can hang a bunch of towels and sheets in the windows of your car, you can pee in people's front yards, you can throw garbage all around your spot. I prefer to be inconspicuous. I don't' have too much stuff. I made curtains for my van that look normal, I use parks and libraries for their free public restrooms, and I put my garbage in trashcans. Even though I usually sleep during the illegal hours, I doubt that I'll ever get pegged.

Drinking. I like to drink once in a while. You have to be careful about it though. Especially when you live in a vehicle. Only drink when you know that you won't need to move the vehicle. Never, put the keys in the ignition when you are drunk. This is not only to keep you from drunk driving, it is also to keep you from getting a needless ticket. Even if you only plan to listen to the radio and go to sleep in the back, a police officer can give you a DUI if the keys are in the ignition and you are drunk. Besides that, don't drink and drive. It's a good way to end up dead or in prison. There are better ways to kill or incarcerate yourself.

Cooking and Eating. I like to barbecue in the park. I make coffee on a single burner propane stove in the back of my van each morning. I'm discreet about it. I don't think anyone sees me cooking in the van. If I go to parks, I cook at the picnic tables. No one seems to notice or care.

Living in vehicles can be fun, cheap and easy. I estimate that with insurance and gas it costs me about $100 a month to live in my van. Much less than the $700 or higher most of my friends pay for rooms or apartments.

Rough Living
An Urban Survival Manual

Cheap Vehicles I've Owned

I've never been a rich man. Maybe you figured that out by now. Because of that, I've never owned a new car. They're just too expensive. I see the price of a new car and I remember that my parents bought a house for that same price back in the 1970's. Lot's of people never own new cars. That's okay, because there are plenty of decent cars out there that are dirt cheap.

Just yesterday, I heard a guy on the radio talking about the economics of buying a new car versus fixing your old one. I wasn't surprised when it came out that fixing the old one is a much cheaper alternative. Despite that, thousands of people sell their perfectly good cars every day so that they can get a new status symbol. Their loss, our gain.

When I was 17, I listened to a guy that blew my mind. He was this bald guy that lived in a van and drove around the country giving motivational speeches to high school kids. I wish I remembered his name. He was the original motivational speaker that lived in a van, down by the river. A couple of things this guy told us really stuck in my mind. He had a good 'Don't do drugs' message which is what got his foot in the door of high schools. I don't remember the specifics of that. What I remember him saying was "Don't waste your time doing something you don't love. Find a way to make your passion your career," and, "Luck is where preparedness meets opportunity."

The other thing I remember was his used car economics theory. It went something like this. If you buy a new car, a cheap new car, it costs you $10,000. It lasts you a maximum of ten years. Instead of that, this guy said, why not buy a $500 car, put no money into it, and drive it until it is dead. That gives you two cars a year for the same price. Chances are some of those cars are going to last longer than a year.

So anyway, the point I'm getting to is that this guy corrupted my way of thinking. I blame him for everything. Ha ha. Here are the last couple of cars

Chris Damitio

I've owned and lived in.

1989 Plymouth Voyager Minivan…cost $175…name PIG
I saw an ad for this one and had to check it out. The car was sputtering and stalling and no one could tell the lady who owned it why. She tried to donate it to charity, but they didn't want a car with a mysterious problem. So she sold it to me for $175. I changed the spark plugs and it fixed the problem. I ditched one of the bench seats, turned the other sideways, picked up a cabinet off the street, and spent $10 to buy flower print fabric for curtains and industrial velcro to hang them with. As of writing this, I've been living in it for better than three months.

1970 VW Bus….cost $200….name PARADISE
There was a hippie guy parking this bus near the kayak shop I was working at. He put a sign in the window and I bought it. I was living in the bushes behind the shop where I had cleared a space and set up my hammock. I cleaned the bus up. I don't know how this dirty guy had lived in the filthy thing. I bought fabric for curtains, nice sheets for the bed, and moved in. This is the bus on the cover of my first book.

1978 VW Bus….cost $100….name TURTLE
I was looking at this bus when the guy came running out of his house and offered it to me for $100. A neighbor helped me get it running and it lasted me three years and four or five trips from Vancouver B.C. to California. I traded it for the laptop computer I'm writing this on.

1977 VW Bus…cost…TV and VCR…name BELLE
This was my first VW. It was rusting away behind the radio station I worked at. They tried to give it away as a prize and I offered the guy my TV and VCR for it. He took the working TV and VCR. I bought a book on VW's,

fixed it, and then bought the interior from a junkyard Westie and moved in. I took this bus to Alaska, where I lived in it and sold it for $1200 before leaving.

Not bad, huh? I've owned probably 25 different cars. They've almost all been pieces of shit. That hasn't stopped me from driving all over most of the United States in them.

Chris Damitio

Food: How to get the grinds

There are plenty of ways to get food if you need it. This is especially true in the United States and other 'Western' countries. Unless you are living in a desperately poor third world country, there isn't much of an excuse to starve. You just have to use the brain you were born with, a little common sense, and maybe even a little bit of muscle and or wit. The following are a few ways to fill your belly. Some of them are services, some of them are scams, and some of them are street smarts. However you do it, you're not going to starve in a Western country.

Foodbanks

The foodbank is a free service that is privately funded in most communities to provide food to those who need it. Most of the food comes from grocery stores that would throw it away if the food bank didn't take it. Produce that isn't beautiful enough to buy, dented canned goods, dairy products that reach their expiration date but are still good for a week or so, and also stuff donated by local people and business. The corporate stores rarely participate. Once a month the government provides "commodities," usually sub par, unhealthy foods like powdered milk, canned beef, and surplus applesauce. Foodbanks are a great way to eat if you don't have money. The best thing about them is that if people don't use them, the food goes to

waste, so you're doing a good thing by taking free food.

On most trips I've taken to the food bank, people are bitching about the wait for free food. I can never understand that. Don't be one of those people.

Food Not Bombs

Food Not Bombs is a group that was born at the height of the Nuclear Protest Movement in 1980. It is organized collectively and relies on consensus decision-making. Food that is donated or saved from dumpsters is prepared into healthy vegan (no animal products) meals. Howard Zinn, the noted historian and author, describes it in the forward to the Food Not Bombs handbook by C.T.Lawrence Butler and Keith McHenry.

"The message of Food Not Bombs is simple and powerful: no one should be without food in a world so richly provided with land, sun, and human ingenuity. No consideration of money, no demand for profit, should stand in the way of any hungry or malnourished child or any adult in need. Here are people that will not be bamboozled by "the laws of the market" that say only people who can afford to buy something can have it."

Zinn goes on…"*They point unerringly to the double challenge: to feed immediately people who are without adequate food, and to replace a system whose priorities are power and profit with one meeting the needs of all human beings."*

I've been to lots of FNB feedings. They are good, social events. The food is usually served in a white plastic tofu container. I"ve had salad and vegetable soup. There was also Guacamole and sourdough bread from a local bakery. Forty or fifty people usually get

fed. There are lots of hands helping the FNB folks unload and then pack it back up. A couple of bags of clothing get handed around and shared throughout the meal. It is inspiring. Most of the people who were eating were the homeless people you don't really notice when you're downtown during business hours. They were crackheads, bagladies, and spare changers. They picked through the clothing occasionally making an exclamation of delight as they found something that would keep them warm or that appealed to them. Everyone sat around having discussions with the people they knew, meeting new people, and overall behaving exactly as anyone behaves as they get food at a picnic or barbecue. It was an atmosphere of respect and human dignity.

Churches

Many churches and missions have regularly scheduled free meals. People who volunteer their time to make the world a better place cook most of these meals. Most meals I've had at churches or missions were cooked and served with love. If you have one of these meals, please take the time to thank the people that serve you.

Food Stamps

Food stamps are as simple to get as having valid ID and an address and phone number in most states. All you have to do to get food stamps is go to the office, jump through some administrative hoops, and claim to be homeless (whether you are or not). I've heard numerous stories of people taking advantage of the generousness of food stamp programs. I'm all for it. I would rather see the money go there than to building new prisons or supporting the wars on drugs or

terror (or anything else we've had a war against in my lifetime.)

A lot of people don't like using food stamps. I'm one of them. I prefer to struggle a bit rather than have the state provide for me. After all, I'm a healthy, somewhat intelligent man, in my early thirties. Don't get me wrong though, I've used food stamps to get me through tough times. I'll do it again if I need to.

Dumpster Diving

I've read reports that claim Americans throw away enough material goods every day to feed, clothe, house, and educate everyone in this country. I believe it. Most grocery stores throw away produce that is perfectly edible but not visibly appealing enough. Dairy products are usually good well beyond the 'sell by' date on them but are thrown away anyway. If you get to know the restaurants in a certain area you can pull unsold hamburgers, donuts, or fried chicken out of the trash with the wrappers still on. I've had burgers from the dumpster that were completely wrapped and still hot. It's all about knowing your dumpsters. Successful dumpster divers usually have rounds and sometimes if you hit a dumpster that is on someone's established rounds they can react as if you are robbing them. If this happens to you, my advice is to simply apologize and offer to give back what you've taken from that dumpster. You never know, that diver might end up a friend that can show you where the best dumpsters for clothes, food, and other things are.

Cafeteria Grazing

I've only done this a few times, but it works if you're hungry and

have no other option. If you go to a self-cleanup kind of restaurant, the kind of place where you put your dishes in a bin before you leave, you can usually find large uneaten portions sitting on plates. It's unsavory, to say the least, but if you hang out for a bit and watch you can usually find someone who eats nearly nothing from their plate and looks clean enough to alleviate any fears of catching a rare disease.

Shoplifting

As a youngster I did a lot of shoplifting. I don't recommend it. The risks are too high. If you're going to shoplift there are a few ways to minimize the risk involved. One method is to have a baggy coat with big pockets and to slyly slip a few items in while you shop. I used to buy something trivial with my pockets loaded to alleviate any suspicion. The problem with shoplifting goes beyond morality to the fact that in all likelihood, you will get caught.

My good friend George Hush was an expert shoplifter for years. He had taken literally thousands of dollars in food and clothing without ever coming close to getting caught. One day he was in the grocery store and saw a 99-cent package of fresh herbs that he thought would go well with some pasta he was going to cook. With a casualness born from years of lifting he dropped them in his pocket.

Seconds later a hand clamped down on his shoulder and he was quickly escorted to the managers office where he was made to wait until a police officer arrived before being told anything. He was

charged with theft, banned from that store for a year, (it was the store with the best deals on beer too!) and had to pay a hefty fine. All in all, it would have been a lot better for George if he had bought those herbs.

Natural Resources

If you are at all familiar with the plants that grow in your area, you can probably survive. In the Pacific Northwest you can get by eating dandelions, nettles, and blackberries. In Hawaii you can live on coconuts, guavas, mangos, and taro. In other places you can go to the library or a bookstore (you don't have to buy the book!) and usually find books on what grows wild and is edible. It's amazing how many 'weeds' are actually nutritious and delicious.

Shopping Smart

Shopping smart is the real way to make sure you have enough to eat. There are some simple things you can do to save lots of money where ever you are.

1) Pick the store that has the lowest prices for what you want to buy. In these times of fancy yuppie grocery stores you can pay double or triple the price for the same item at grocery stores a few miles apart. Sometimes Safeway has better prices on meat, Foodland has better prices on potatoes, and The Grocery Outlet has the best prices on canned goods. Know your grocery stores.
2) Asian markets. Most major cities have a Chinatown or Asian Grocery stores. Check them out. I can buy a pineapple for $6

at Foodland or $1.50 in Chinatown. I can pay $3 for a can of sweetened condensed milk or $.75 Asian immigrants generally eat well on a low income. Follow their lead, learn to eat the cheap foods you can get in Chinatown and Asian Grocerys.

3) Food choices. It's been said plenty, but obviously, if you eat a pound of meat, three times a day, you are not only spending a lot, you're probably pretty unhealthy. Rice, noodles, and potatoes are cheap, nutritious, and filling. I don't care what Dr. Atkins said.
4) Bakery Thrift Shop. This is the leftover and damaged bread from local bakeries. I can pay $2 for a loaf at the grocery store or $.20 for a loaf at the bakery thrift shop. If I want to get day old good bread, I can get that at a bakery for half price or less.
5) Reduced meat section. Most grocery stores have a reduced price meat section. The meat that doesn't sell while it still looks pretty gets the price cut drastically. Don't be scared, they won't sell you diseased or spoiled meat.

Cooking and Storing Food

I spend a lot of time talking about food and cooking in this book. The reason for that is that I think food is one of the great pleasures in life. You don't have to have a gourmet kitchen to make a meal that satisfies your soul. Hell, you don't even have to have a kitchen. In this chapter, I'm going to talk about some of the options available to people that don't have stoves, ovens, refrigerators, or cooking pots.

Refrigerators

I haven't had one in a few years. There are people all over the world that have never had one. There are folks that have lived on sailboats for years on end without having a reefer. It seems almost impossible to most people in the US that have never been without one.

I believe that the refrigerator is part of a massive conspiracy by General Electric to enslave us all by making us need electricity. Take a look at the labels of just about everything "Refrigerate after Opening". Is it really necessary?

People existed on this planet without refrigerators until about 100 years ago. At that point some whiz kid came up with a pretty cool way to extend the shelf life of perishables without having a cool well, root cellar, or ice room. Pretty cool. I'm not knocking refrigeration as a concept. I think it's good.

The thing that bothers me is when the big production companies didn't have anything to produce following the second world war, they decided that everyone in America should have a refrigerator. They took a page form the car companies and began making new models, having showrooms, and lobbying the government to require 'safe

food handling'. They lobbied the food companies to put those 'refrigerate after opening' tags on the food.

Most fruits and vegetables don't need to be refrigerated. This extends the shelf life of them, but it's not necessary.

Eggs can be cracked open and put in a plastic container. If you use one with a spout the eggs will generally pour out one at a time. This is usually good for about four days barring too much heat. Eggs in the shell can last anywhere from a week to six months without spoiling. To test them, drop the egg in a cup of water. If it floats, it is no good. To extend the life of eggs in the shell coat them with Vaseline or shortening. This seals the pourous shells and prevents air from getting inside. Store them in a box on soft material.

Meat lasts a while. When I was a kid and lived on a farm, anytime we butchered something we hung the carcass up in the barn for several days to 'season' with bag over it to keep the flys out. If I buy a steak, I feel fine waiting twenty four hours to cook it.

Cheese has a long life. Wrap hard cheeses in vinegar soaked cheesecloth or rags to keep them from molding. Soft cheese should be thrown out once it begins to mold.

Dairy products like butter are just fine left out of refrigeration. Milk has a shorter shelf life. I'm not sure why this is. On the farms we would put milk in those big canisters and let it sit for a day or two and it would be just fine. I'm told that it's the fat that keeps milk good longer. That's why half and half or whole cream lasts longer than skim milk. Sometimes I'll buy a quart of half and half and it's good for a day or two. I just thin it with water when I use it on my cereal.

I'm not recommending that anyone test the limits of how far you can let something go before it spoils. For goodness sake, don't poison yourself. What I do is buy perishables as I need them. I visit the grocery store every day or two. I enjoy it.

Now, if you want to have refrigeration or an icebox, there are options. There are12 volt DC ice chest / reefers available fairly cheap. You can also get a standard ice chest and put block ice in the bottom, with perishables on top. In Africa, they will put a small clay pot inside a large clay pot and pack sand between the two. Pour water on the sand and put a wet cloth over the top and it creates a natural refrigerator in the smaller pot. Pretty cool, huh?

Stoves

There are a lot of options available if you want to use a stove. You can find coleman two burner camp stoves that run on propane or white gas at any outdoor stores, most box stores, some thrift stores, and garage sales. You can get them for anywhere from $5 to $100 and they work every bit as good as a kitchen stove. They are legal in most parks and easy to use.

I prefer the single burner propane stove. One canister of propane is usually about $3 and the burner itself usually runs anywhere from $5 to $20. The canister lasts me one to two months cooking twice a day.

A simple stove can be made by putting corrugated cardboard in a roll inside a tuna can and melting wax over it. This is the same as sterno which will cost you about $1 a can. Not a very efficient way to cook, but it works.

For backpackers there are a variety of lightweight stoves that burn anything. They burn kerosene, propane, gasoline, or white gas. They cost form $60 up and they aren't very practical for car or boat living. I have one, but only use it for backpacking.

Convenience Foods

As far as rough living goes. Convenience foods aren't' very convenient. Microwavable foods are a pain in the ass and usually don't' taste very good. Of course, things like chips, crackers, and easy cheese can make a nice treat.

Thermos Cooking

There are a number of people out there that cook most of their meals in a thermos. What they do is bring water to a boil and pour it in a thermos with their noodles, rice, cereal, or what have you . Seal it up and let the boiling water cook whatever you have.

Foil cooking

This is one of my favorite ways to cook. It's easy, it's fast, and the cleanup is minimal. Basicly, you wrap what you want to cook in foil, toss it on the grill or coals, and wait for it to be done.

You can make a frying pan by twisting a loop into a wire coat

hanger and then filling the loop with foil and wrapping it around the edges.

Car Cooking- using the manifold

I had a step dad that used to use this method. Mom would cook up a mess of fried chicken and he would put it in a metal bucket, cover it with foil, and wire it to the manifold of his Bronco. Then we would go drive out in the woods to some remote lake, and have hot fried chicken waiting for us under the hood.

You can actually cook steak, potatos, or just about anything else by wrapping it up and wiring it to the manifold. You can put a can of Campbell's soup on the engine and drive to the next rest area to have hot soup.

Because engines will vary, cooking time will vary.

Baking with a Tin Can

Some hobo friends taught me a simple way to bake using tin cans. First they took a large coffee can and cut a hole in one side. Placing it with the opening down on the coals, they continued to feed twigs and brush through the hole.

Next they took a cleaned out tuna can and filled it about half way with cake batter and placed it on top of three rocks on the tin can stove (this keeps the bottom from burning by allowing air to circulate under the can.) Then they covered the 'cake' with another can and fifteen minutes later they had a little cake.

I saw them use the same coffee can bottom to fry up bacon and

eggs.

A Quick Guide to Making a Fire

1) Start by gathering all the materials you will need before you light the fire.

2) The base is something small and dry (known as tinder) such as shredded tree bark, shredded cardboard, paper, or steel wool. Have a good supply of twigs. A good place to get dry ones is right off of trees or bushes. If they make a distinct snap when you break them and they break clean they will probably work.

3) Place a few twigs on your tinder and light it. As the flame grows feed it more twigs and gradually work your way up to sticks, branches, and logs. The true key is to hold yourself back from piling everything on. Use patience. That's it.

Cooking with Fire

Of course, the oldest method of cooking is using the fire. You use the fire just like you would a stove. There are a few things to remember.

1) Coals cook more evenly than flames. If you are going to cook directly over the fire (no pot cooking) then cook over coals. Hardwood coals are the best for no pot cooking as some soft woods contain foul tasting smoke.
2) Never build your fire over tree roots. The fire can follow the roots and burn down a forest.
3) Build your fire at least 15 feet from any brush or overhanging trees

The Basics of Pit Cooking

Pit cooking can be a lot of work and is really only worth it if you are cooking an entire pig, deer, or other large amount of food. Hawaiians, Native Americans, and other tribal peoples use pit cooking for village

celebrations.

1) Dig your pit about 2 feet deep by four feet around
2) Line the pit with rocks (Don't use river rocks or other rocks that hold moisture as they might explode.)
3) Lay out your fire leaving an easy way to light it. This needs ot be a big fire with lots of wood. Pile lots of rocks in and on the fire pile.
4) Light it up and allow it to burn to coals. At this point you should have a pit filled with red hot rocks and coals.
5) Lay a pulpy type of leaves or grass over the top. Something that contains a lot of water so that it will not burn. (Bananna leaves are what they use in Hawaii)
6) Place your meat and vegetables over the pulpy material.
7) Cover the meat and vegetables with more pulpy material.
8) Place more rocks on the pulp.
9) Build another huge fire over the rocks and allow it to burn down.
10) Enjoy your day
11) Carefully excavate the pit and remove your delicious meal steamed by the water in the grass.

There are many ways to do this. This is one way I have learned.

Other Ways to Cook

Here are a few other interesting ways to cook without a kitchen.

1) You can cook eggs and bacon in paper bag by layering the bottom of the paper bag with bacon and then putting the eggs on top. Fold the bag over, poke a stick through it, and hold it over your heat source.
2) You can put hot rocks from your fire inside a chicken and then wrap it in foil. Put more hot rocks on the wrapped chicken. You can also cook eggs and other foods on flat rocks around your fire.
3) You can poke a green stick or a clean wire hanger through your food and cook it over flames or coals.
4) Cook eggs or meat inside an onion or orange then wrap in foil. You can also cook a cake inside an orange and you end up getting a nice 'hint of orange' taste.
5) Toast bread on white coals. Just lay the bread on the coals and allow it to toast. Then blow the ash off. This takes practice to get it perfect.
6) Fish with the skin on can be laid directly on whit coals too.
7) A camp oven can be made by cutting the flaps off a small box (9" x 6" x 6") and lining it with tinfoil. Find a box that is a little bigger and place the small box inside (a box with a lid works well. Line it with foil too.) Line the empty space inside with newspaper or sawdust. When you are ready to cook something, simply put it in the small box, place the lid on the larger box and put it in the coals.
8) Use tin cans for cooking by layering your food in the following order in the can. Meat, vegetables, and seasoning. Cover it with foil and put it in the fire for 30 to 45 minutes.

Utensils

I keep it pretty simple on the utensils. I have a can opener, fork,

knife, spoon, set of chopsticks, and a simple mess kit with a pot, pan, and plate. I use a lot of foil.

That doesn't mean you shouldn't have a good set of cooking gear though. One of my favorite things to cook with is a big cast iron frying pan. Lot's of folks swear by Dutch ovens. Back when I used to carry a lot of stuff I used my hand mixer, spatula, and cheese grater a lot.

It all depends on what you want to make a priority. I can pretty much cook anything with what I have. If I use my creativity to fill in the gaps.

Old mesh orange sacks work well as a carryall bag or a pot scrubber.

Filling egg carton cups with sawdust or lint and pouring old wax over the top can make fire starters.

Cleaning up

Not having a sink can be a bit of a pain but you can still keep your gear clean. I use a couple of simple methods to wash up.

1) I usually have a container of liquid soap with me.
2) If water isn't available, you can wipe the dishes clean
3) Sand and gravel work as natural abrasives
4) Vinegar in a burned or stained pan usually will work it loose with soaking
5) Keep it simple. The less you dirty, the less you have to clean

Rough Recipes

Here are some of my favorite recipes using a variety of cooking methods. Most of them can be prepared anywhere.

Chris Damitio

Rough Living
An Urban Survival Manual

Chris Damitio

Rough Living Scramble

This is my favorite breakfast recipe. Like all of the recipes in this section, most of the ingredients can be whatever you find or have handy. Use your imagination or your host's pantry to fill in the blanks.

Ingredients

4 eggs
2 large potatoes
3 tbsp cooking oil
garlic
small onion
various vegetables and herbs (whatever you can find)
shredded cheese
spices

Directions

Cut the potatoes into small cubes (1/4 inch) while you allow the oil (or butter) to melt in a skillet. Drop the potatoes in and cook on

high heat for 5-10 minutes allowing them to brown and or burn slightly. Mince garlic, onion, vegetables, and herbs. Pour off the excess oil. Drop in your minced goods and cook 3-5 minutes adding spices (like a pinch of cinnamon, salt, pepper, and cayenne). Beat the eggs in a small dish. Pour eggs over the top and cook 1-2 minutes before flipping the entire thing. If you fail to flip it in one piece, just scramble the whole thing until all the egg is cooked. Put shredded cheese on top, cover for 1 minute, and serve it up.

Chris Damitio

Vagabond Sandwiches

This is a fun meal to make. I like to use Hot and Spicy Spam but any meat will work.

Chris Damitio

Ingredients

1/2 lb. cooked meat, cubed

1/2 lb. cheese, cubed

2 hard boiled eggs, chopped

1/2 c. olives, chopped

1/2 c. mayo

3 Tbsp. chilli or bbq sauce

1/3 c. onion, chopped

12 hotdog buns or folded pieces of bread

Directions

Mix all together and fill hotdog buns with mixture, wrap in foil, and heat 10-15 minutes.

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George Hush's Hobo Supper

The Hobo Supper or Hobo Packet can be made about 5000 different ways. This is the first version I learned following is my current favorite.

Chris Damitio

Ingredients

3 pounds ground beef

4 medium potatoes, quartered

3 carrots, sliced

1 medium onion, sliced

salt and pepper to taste

1 can cream of mushroom soup

Directions

Form ground beef into patties and place each on a square of aluminum foil. Divide potatoes, carrots, and onions equally and arrange on top of patties. Add salt and pepper to taste. Place a spoonful of mushroom soup on top of vegetables. Seal foil tightly and place on grill or directly on coals for about 45 minutes to an hour. Can also be cooked in the oven at 350 degrees F. for 45 minutes. Delicious and easy

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Uncle Larry's Hobo Packet

Chris Damitio

Ingredients
1 pound of sliced pork

4 medium potatoes, quartered

2 sweet potatos

1 large onion, sliced

salt and pepper to taste

chopped red chili peppers

juice of half a lemon

clove of garlic, chopped

Directions

Same thing, lay out your foil. Chop up your pork. Put equal parts in the packets. Divide potatoes, sweet potato, garlic, pepper, and onions equally and arrange on top of meat. Add salt and pepper to taste. Seal foil tightly and place on grill or directly on coals for about 45 minutes to an hour. Can also be cooked in the oven at 350 degrees F. for 45 minutes. Delicious and easy

Chris Damitio

Chris Damitio

Ingredients

Large onion

1/4 C. (1/2 stick) butter

Salt

Pepper

Directions

Score onion across the top several times and place in aluminum foil. Put butter, salt and pepper on top of onion and close the foil securely. Set directly in the fire and cook approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Unwrap and enjoy!

Chris Damitio

Scallywag Potatoes

Chris Damitio

Ingredients

2 cups potatoes, peeled & cubed

1 cup chopped onions

1/2 cup thinly sliced carrots

1/2 cup diagonally sliced celery

2 T. water

1/2 tsp. salt

1/8 tsp. pepper

8 slices bacon, crisply cooked and cut into 2" pieces

1 T. or butter or margarine

Directions

Combine potatoes, onions, carrots, celery and water. Boil until vegetables are hot and just beginning to cook, stirring once or twice during cooking time. Drain, then stir in salt and pepper. Place potato mixture on a large sheet of heavy duty aluminum foil. Top with

crumbled bacon and dot with butter or margarine. Bring up ends of foil to wrap securely and fold top of foil to seal. Place on grill, 4" to 6" above medium coals. Cook for 25 to 30 minutes or until vegetables are tender.

Chris Damitio

Hopalongs Cattail Salad

Chris Damitio

Cattails grow along the road in ditches and standing water throughout the United States. They are those tall weeds with the bulbous brown tops that grow in thick patches.

Ingredients

As many Cattail stalks as possible (peeled down to the soft white centers)

Bacon (minced)

Fine Mustard

Vinegar

Directions

Boil the hearts of cattail for 30 seconds. Heat the bacon in a skillet. Add the mustard and vinegar. Add the cattail hearts.

Chris Damitio

Aquillo's Favorite Cheese Steak

Chris Damitio

Ingredients

Cheap sandwich meat

Onions

Cheese

Rolls

Pickled Peppers

Directions

Mince onion. Cut baloney into long strips. Sauté onions till slightly browned add meat. Cook till the meat is slightly brown. Stuff the rolls with your "steak". Top with peppers cheese. Wrap in newspaper and enjoy.

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Piggery Pie

Chris Damitio

Ingredients

Shredded pork

Blue sweet potatos

2 baking potatos

3 small red onions

½ clove of garlic

salt and pepper

snap beans

cilantro

small hot peppers

butter

milk

Directions

Cook the pork onions garlic cilantro in a frying pan. In a kettle boil the baking potatoes and blue potatoes (thinly sliced or minced) and snap beans until soft. Drain the water. Add butter and milk. Whip. Add the pork mixture. Serve with salad.

Chris Damitio

Poor Guy Pasta Pesto

Chris Damitio

Ingredients

1 package of pasta

1 bunch of cilantro chopped fine

half a clove of garlic, peeled and minces

3 small red onions peeled and minced

ginger, shredded and minced

calimans

olive oil

vinegar

salt and pepper

Directions

Cook your pasta. Meanwhile heat olive oil in a cast iron pan. Add all the other ingredients to the oil. Turn off the heat. Mix thoroughly. Drain water from pasta. Add cilantro pesto to the pasta and mix until mixture is evenly distributed over the pesto.

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Philippine Pork Adobo

Ingredients

Garlic

Vinegar

Soy sauce

Onion

Salt

Pepper

Pork 1 lb

Kalimansi (small lime)

Chris Damitio

Directions

Cut the pork into bite size pieces and marinate it in a mixture of 2/3 vinegar, 1/3 soy, and finely minced garlic and onion. Allow to sit for several hours. Cook in a frying pan or skillet on medium heat in olive oil. Create a dipping sauce from 2/3 vinegar, 1/3 soy, juice and seeds of 2 Kalimansi, and small hot peppers minced. Red onion and garlic in sauce is optional . Serve with rice.

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Chris Damitio

Tim's Fish Taco's

Ingredients

Fish fillets

eggs

Flour

Corn tortillas

One head of cabbage

A lemon

Ranch Dressing

Pico de Gallo Hot Sauce

Salsa

Guacamole

Directions

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Beat the eggs in a bowl. Lay the four on a flat surface. Dip the fillets in the egg and then into the flour. Cover both sides. Fry the fillets in oil for approximately one minute per side.

Heat the tortillas. Slice the cabbage into slivers approx. ¼ inch wide. Mix the ranch dressing and a healthy amount of tapetio. Fill tortilla with fish, cabbage, salsa, and guacamole. Top with special sauce and lemon juice.

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Quickies

Fried Ramen with Egg.
Boil a package of Top Ramen. Drain. Fry in oil for a minute or so. Add season package. Drop an egg or two into the mix. Cook for another minute.

Other Special Ramen Meals
Add vegetables, meat, or peanuts to ramen to make ti special. Anything livens up ramen.

Spam Eggs and Rice
This is a favorite in Hawaii. Slice your spam thin and cook it like bacon. Serve scrambled eggs with rice and spam.

Smoked Salmon Chowder
Cook a can of cream of potato soup and add in a piece of smoked salmon

chopped into fine pieces.

Smoked Salmon Hash
Fry potatoes and onions in small pieces. Add smoked salmon.

Stick bread
Mix flour, salt, baking soda, butter , and water to make a thick dough. Flatten it with a can. Wrap it around the end of a clean stick and hold it over coals. Pull the bread off after a few minutes and fill the hole with jam or peanut butter.

Huevos Rancheros Especial
Cook a can of black beans. Fry a couple of eggs. Heat a few corn tortillas. Toss the beans on the tortillas, the eggs on the beans, and salsa and sour cream on top of that. Chopped onions, garlic, and cilantro make this one ten times better.

Perfect Rice
The secret to making perfect rice is simple. Rinse your rice. Put it in the pan. Add enough water to go from the top of the rice leveled to the first joint of your first finger. Boil until water is gone. Leave covered for five minutes before eating.

Tuna Melts
Mix the tuna with onion, garlic, and whatever else you think will taste good. Put tuna and cheese on bread. Put mayo on the outsides of both slices of bread. Fry until brown on a dry pan. The mayo has enough oil.

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Chris Damitio

Cash: Coming up with Jack

For most of my life, I've had jobs. I've had lots of jobs. When I was in 4th grade I had a paper route, when I was in middle school and high school, my parents paid me for chores, when I was 14 I got my first job at a restaurant.

Since then I've washed dishes, bussed table, waitered, bartended, cooked, and hosted in dozens of restaurants. I've dug ditches, built houses, painted houses, and cleaned all the stuff money can buy out of people's garages. I've filed papers, ran meetings, cold called, door knocked, and answered phones. I've been a DJ and done craft services on a movie set. I've been a stand in, a radio producer, a band manager, and an air traffic controller. I've managed buildings, served as a Marine, and shoveled shit. I've tried to find "my calling" in so many different career paths that I've nearly run out of choices.

The problem with all of them is that I like my time. I was born with all of it, and I don't see why I should give it to someone else unless it's really what I want to be doing. I've found jobs that were based around things I like doing. Things like skiing, kayaking, and hanging out in bars. The problem is that if somebody is paying me, my time quits being mine and becomes his or hers. Employment is slavery. As soon as someone starts paying me for my time, I realize how much it's worth to me. And the problem is, my time is worth a lot more than $60,000 dollars a year let alone $6.50 an hour.

Don't get me wrong; I've had "good" jobs. Job's where I was treated right, the pay was decent, and the "benefits" were

comprehensive. I just knew that my time belonged to someone else. Since I don't know when I will die, that was still unacceptable. I've never had a wage slave mentality. I refuse to get a minimum wage job at Wal-Mart. I'd rather eat cat food from dumpsters.

The guys at the top aren't working. They just encourage us to fill our garages and our stomachs with things we never would have thought of were it not for their non-stop television, radio, and print campaigns. The advertising companies work for the factories that churn out more and more useless 'necessities' every day. They encourage us to consume, consume, consume and spend, spend, spend.

The bottom line is you gotta do what you gotta do to get the money to survive. I've broken up concrete driveways for Irish Gypsies in England, moved tons of rocks in Hawaii, and taught conversational English to schoolchildren in Indonesia. Working while you are on the road is generally more fun than having a real job because you know that you are going to be leaving. If having a career works for you, more power to you, but so far it hasn't worked for me. Here is some of what I've used to get by.

Phone, Physical Address, and E-Mail Address

If you want to get employment it is always helpful to have a phone number and address. It's more than helpful. In today's world, it is almost impossible to get a job without looking like you have a place to live and a respectable past. Meaning, you are a worker. The plus side is that it's not just a way for potential employers to contact you; it also gives your family and friends a way to contact you. These things also help you out if you are applying for any type of government

benefits or a job.

Phone

Prepaid cell phones are a relatively cheap and convenient way to not only get messages but also to have a phone. My first prepaid cell phone and 200 minutes of prepaid anytime use cost $138 at K-Mart. This includes voicemail. If I want to buy additional minutes I can buy 150 for about $40. You can get them cheaper now. Buy a used phone and minutes. Less than $50.

E-Mail and Internet

If you don't have e-mail yet, you're missing out on a great way to keep in contact with the people you know and the people you meet. Most libraries offer free internet access, internet café's are plentiful and cheap, and www.yahoo.com still offers free e-mail use.

Laptops

With my laptop I can find internet access pretty much anywhere. It's called WiFi. Lot's of business's provide free wireless laptop access if you buy a cup of coffee. If you don't want to buy a cup of coffee you can do what they call war dialing. You just go to a neighborhood where someone might have a wireless network and not enough savvy to have it encoded. There are commercial products you can use to find these 'hotspots' but what I do is put in my wireless card and drive around the rich neighborhoods slowly until I get a good signal. Then I pull over and surf the net in my van.

Who would of guessed the homeless would get internet from the rich for free?

Address

Sometimes you can use a friend's, but there are other ways to get a physical address. When I moved from North Carolina to Washington State, I used some of my limited resources to get a post office box at a shipping supply store. The advantage of this over the Post Office is that you can use the physical address of the place on resumes and job applications.

Daily Labor

Daily labor is a way to get some money in your pocket. The problem is that you need to get there early, the pay isn't necessarily good, and the work usually sucks. I've used services like Labor Ready only twice in my life because I can usually find a better way to spend my time and get what I need.

Under the Table (Risks and Benefits)

Working for anyone under the table is always a risky venture. You are putting trust in someone that you probably don't know very well. The truth is that if they choose not to pay you or to short your pay there isn't much you can do about it.

On the positive side, if you are getting paid under the table you aren't paying taxes and your boss isn't paying taxes so you are both making more than if you were legitimate. Personally, I like that none of the money goes to supporting programs we don't agree with. (We can always anonymously donate to causes we do agree with.)

Farms

If you arrive at the right part of the year, you can almost always find farm work in exchange for food, shelter, or sometimes even cold, hard cash. Farm work isn't easy though. The hours are long, the work is usually dirty and labor intensive, and the pay is usually minimum wage or less. However, I have known people that had wonderful times picking apples in Washington State or Australia, pulling potatoes in Idaho, or working on organic farms in the Cascades and Kauai.

Gambling

Gambling is a risky venture. There is a reason why the casinos are so fancy. The reason is that most people lose. I have a simple system that has actually left me a bit ahead. I decide how much I can afford to lose, I stick to that, and every time I win anything in excess of my original amount I put it in my pocket. Once I lose the amount I planned on, I leave…usually.

I don't' recommend gambling to anyone, but the combination of unemployment checks and casino winnings took me on a four month

journey through China, Laos, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Taiwan. Sometimes it works out…but only if you're lucky.

Legitimate Work

I hate legitimate work. It's true. I hate it. At this moment, as I write this I am struggling over whether to re enter the work force. I'm broke and it sucks. I'd like to be traveling or drinking with some fancy woman. Unfortunately, I know that I hate to work for some jackass that makes more money off the work I do than I do. So I probably won't do it.

It's a periodic struggle and I've fallen prey to it before. I did the stockbroker thing, the restaurant thing, the construction thing. It all sucks. The last legitimate job was trying to book people into timeshare presentations in Waikiki. It was so gross. I had to walk up on people trying to enjoy their vacations and try to sucker them into going to a timeshare presentation. I wanted to murder these nice people sometimes when they would put up their hand in the ""talk to the hand" gesture. I wanted to scream at them that I was a nice guy only trying to make a living but knew that wouldn't earn me any commission. So I did the right thing. I quit.

Now I am taking periodic work as a production assistant on films that come here to Oahu. I don't consider it real work. The pay is roughly $100 a day. The work is easy. The people are generally cool to work with. It's a good gig. Problem is I've only got four days of work this month. If I lived in LA on the other hand…

Enough of my work problems though…you want to know how to get some cash…

Creating a Resume

Despite my lack of money, I know how to get a job. The first step is

to have a dynamic resume. Put your name in bold letters across the top. Put the address where you can get your mail. Put your cell number and email address. Then make up whatever they want to hear.

Read the ad, look at what they are asking for, and then figure out how to change your experience so that you are exactly what they want.

Here's an example for you…I saw this ad in the Honolulu Advertiser about three months ago when I got back from the Philippines with almost no money and was couch surfing at my passive aggressive friends house.

Assistant manager wanted at upscale Waikiki
Restaurant. At least two years of restaurant
Management experience required. Strong refrences.

I needed a job. So I made a resume that said I had worked at a four restaurants on the mainland during the past ten years. Even though I hadn't.

Here are a few things employers don't want to see:

1) A long list of short term jobs. Instead list one or two jobs that lasted a couple of years. Pick places that you know went out of business. If you get asked for a reference use a friend and prep them ahead of time. Dot coms are great for this.
2) Think of reasons employers can feel good about why you left your last jobs. Not 'personality conflict' or 'personal reason'.
3) A work history that has you scattered all over the globe. It's interesting but they want an employee who will be their wage slave for years to come.

So there was my made up resume. I turned it in and then, very

important, I followed up with a personal visit two days later. I was dressed nice. I knew the managers name because I had asked for it when I handed my resume to the hostess. I asked for him and when they asked me why I wanted to see him I told them that he wanted to see me about the assistant manager position. The bartender looked at me and thought , “This guy might be my next boss” and he went and got the manager who then came out and greeted me with a confused handshake. I told him that I had dropped off my resume a couple of days ago and wanted to make sure that he had gotten it. He told me it was on his desk and I asked if he could please check as there had been a lot going on when I gave it to the hostess.

He went and checked and that forced him to look at my made up credentials. He was impressed and asked me to sit for an immediate interview where he asked me lots of questions about the work I had done at my phony restaurants. I had done my homework and answered his questions with the right answers.

Two days later he called me for a second interview. He had checked my phony references and apparently I passed. A week later he offered me the job. I turned it down. I’m not real sure why. I think it’s because I hate working for some company that makes more money off of my work than I do. For some reason I took the timeshare job.

If you want a job, that’s how you get it. Tell them what they want to hear.

Chris Damitio

Getting from there to here

There are plenty of ways to get where you need to go. If you have a car, there's probably no need to explain how to drive somewhere. The important thing is that you need to get somewhere. What are your options?

Hitchhiking

Hitchhiking is risky. You should know that before you even consider it. Personally, I think it is a lot less risky than most people think, but there are plenty of horror stories about what happens to hitchhikers, particularly women by themselves. I don't recommend hitchhiking to anyone, but I've had some great experiences thumbing it in twenty states and five countries. There are a few things that can minimize your risk if you choose to stick out your thumb.

(1) Trust your instincts...ask where someone is going when they stop, before you get in their car. If anything (like crushed beer cans on the floor, a smell, the way they talk, or just a feeling) makes you nervous about the person then come up with a reason to tell them why you don't want the ride. Don't get in the car if anything tells you not to.

(2) If at all possible keep your bag where you are riding until you trust the person.

(3) Tell the person that you are expected someplace up the road and that you have recently talked to someone from where they picked you up (even if you haven't.)

(4) If during the course of the ride you begin to feel nervous, ask

to be let off. Insist on being let off.

(5) I rarely accept invitations to stay at someone's house, shower, or have a meal unless I feel positive that the person has no ulterior motive. Why put yourself in a wolf's den unnecessarily? All I want is a ride.

(6) I don't know how much good it would do in any circumstance, as I've never had to use it, but I like to have my knife accessible and close by

(7) Get to know the person, ask questions, and talk to them about them rather than about you. Even psychos feel more kindly about someone who takes an interest in them and doesn't tell them that they are wrong. A ride is not the time to get on your soapbox, so even if you disagree with a person, don't tell them they are wrong about anything. If you disagree so much about something that you can't contain yourself, ask them to pull over and get out of the car.

I like hitchhiking, but it's not for everyone. There are a few things that can increase your chances of getting a ride.

1) Dress nice and look clean. Nobody wants to pick up someone who smells bad or looks like they don't take care of themselves.

2) Pick the spot you hitch from with care. Make sure there is an area that drivers can pull safely off the road past you.

3) If you have a choice, hitch where there are more poor people on the road. People from all walks of life have picked me up, but by and large poor people understand what it means to need a ride better than the rich do. Poor people are also much less suspicious that you are going to try to rob them or take their car. After all, who would want to steal a 1977 Pinto?

4) Flying a piece of cardboard with a well known destination shows motorists that you are a legitimate traveler trying to get to a legitimate destination, even if you are not.

Swimming

I'm not a good enough swimmer to get anywhere but from the beach to about 100 yards out and back. I hear that some people can swim miles though. It's not very practical unless you want to swim across the Rio Grande.

Biking

My good friend George Hush rode his bike from Los Angeles to Seattle. I have other friends that have rode to Alaska. If you want to bike long distance be sure you have a decent bike, that you know how to fix it, and that you can carry the gear you will need.

Walking and Running

Run Forest Run! That guy Peter walked across America. Forest Gump ran for what seemed like years. This is a good way to get from one place to another. I try to limit my walking to a couple of miles a day. It's good for downtown, it's good for the beach, and it's good if you have a problem you need to think about and the time to think about it.

Bus and Train

Traveling by bus is relatively cheap. The drawback's are that you never know who you are going to be on the bus with, who's going to sit next to you, it takes forever, and the ride is generally uncomfortable. Sometimes you get lucky, sometimes you don't. Greyhound stations are always in the seedy part of town.

Traveling by train, on the other hand, is romantic. Someday I will hop a freight train but I haven't yet. For now, I'll talk strictly about passenger trains. I've rode on passenger trains in England, Scotland, Thailand, China, Canada, and America. Trains are by far my favorite way to travel. You can move around. They are comfortable. You can consume alcohol. Trains cost nearly as much as flying and take far longer, but the trip is always worth it.

Travel by Plane

I'd have loved to live in the days when people dressed up to fly. Unfortunately, flying is not too much different from riding on a Greyhound in the sky. The exception to that is when you fly on the airlines of second or third world countries. There is still a feeling of luxury as the passengers applaud the flight attendants in Taipei or when you are served a truly gourmet meal aboard a flight in Laos. Flying takes you from one place to another quickly and sometimes that results in culture shock.

Travel by Boat

Traveling on the water is always fun. The worst time I've ever had on a boat was when my brother and I took a cruise from Fort Lauderdale to Grand Bahama on a bonafide cruise ship. The ship

was nice; it was the passengers that sucked. Fat, old, white tourists. From that, I know that I will never willingly take a cruise liner anywhere. Other than that I love to travel on boats. Sunset cruises in Hawaii, riding the ferry between Malaysia and Sumatra, riding the ferry to the San Juan Islands, catching a lift on a fishing boat in Juneau, Alaska. Boats are cool. The only problem with boats is the people you sometimes end up trapped with.

By Hook or By Crook

The bottom line to all of this is that there are ways to get and do what you want even if you are a person of limited means. Sure, you might have to bend the rules a little to make a situation more favorable. You might even do something illegal once in a while. But, by and large, I've found that if you don't hurt anyone your life is generally better for it.

The People of the Fire

In junior high school I remember hearing Plato's allegory to the cave. It goes something like this:

A bunch of people are sitting in a cave watching the shadows flickering on the wall as a huge fire burns behind them. None of them have ever looked anywhere but the wall of the cave. They don't even know about the fire. All they know is the shadows on the wall and they think that is all there is to reality.

One day one of them gets up and turns around. He sees the fire. He sees what causes the shadows and he even wanders outside of the cave. It's amazing! He sees the whole world and rushes back in to tell the others. None of them believe him and eventually they convince him that the shadows are all there is to the world.

I like to think of rough living sort of like that. It's not the reality that is important. It's the experience you get from it. A lot of the people you meet when you are living this way have discovered a world outside of the cave. They want to share it with someone. They get told they are crazy for it. I think that's the reason why a lot of them actually go crazy.

The fire makes a pretty good allegory. Maybe it won't be the fire you meet people by. Maybe it will be in the park or at the library. Maybe you will run into the same people at the food bank or the unemployment office. These are the people of the fire.

Armchair Adventurers

Someone who lives vicariously through the writing of others; i.e anyone who enjoys a good book while leading a "normal" life

Chris Damitio

Astro Fascist

Usually hippies, these people refuse to believe that anything can be determined without the proper astrological reading i.e. “Of course you don’t get along, I’m sure he’s a Leo”

Bum

Someone who doesn't go anywhere without visible means of support.

Hippies

Usually a person who tuned in, turned on, and dropped out in the late 1960’s or early 1970’s or a person who is attempting to live like the original hippies did. Too often today, the self proclaimed hippie can be identified by astro fascist ideas, militant veganism, or too many opinions on the bumper of their welfare wagon. Often energy vampires.

Hobo

Someone who travels about from place to place, usually by train, without visible means of income

Homeless

Someone who has no home usually conjures up images of street people

Houseless

Someone without a house, usually meaning someone who carries their home in their heart i.e. home is where you hang your heart

Tramp

A person who travels about, usually on foot without visible means of income

Traveler

someone on a journey from one place to a series of other places, generally a lifetime occupation involving learning about other cultures and experiencing them, travelers are usually on a tight budget that has to last a significant length of time and are not to be confused with tourists

Trustafarian

Chris Damitio

Usually a rich white kid advocating all sorts of protest while living on the income of their parents.

Tourist

Someone who has paid too much for their tickets, accommodations, and attractions and so feels that everyone they come into contact with is somehow responsible for their having a good time before they return to their home and career. The tourist is to be pitied for their useless attempts to see all of Europe in two weeks or see Alaska, the Caribbean, or the South Pacific from a luxury cruise ship

Vagabond

Someone who moves around freely from place to place sometimes having visible means of income, sometimes existing without income, and sometimes bending the law to provide what they need.

Code of Conduct

There is a code of conduct among people who are living rough. It is simple and clear. Treat people with respect and dignity but don't take anyone's shit. If you let people walk all over you, they will usually do it again and again. Either look them in the eye and tell them what your beef is or put enough distance between you and

them that you don't have to deal with it. If you have a fire and someone calls from outside saying they are T H and C (tired hungry and cold), invite them to sit down and eat if you have food to share. If it's your fire you can always tell them to move along. If it's you coming on a fire, calling from outside the fire's light is a way to keep from getting shot. It also gives you a chance to see if these are people you want to interact with.

The rest of the code is pretty simple. If you got extra and somebody else needs it; share.

People to Avoid

There are millions of people out there that are worth meeting and talking to, if only to hear their perspectives. There are also people it is worth going out of your way to avoid or avoid spending any significant time with.

Rednecks and Redneck Tramps

There are a lot of definitions to the term redneck. There are a lot of jokes about rednecks. There is really nothing funny about them though. I consider rednecks to be the most dangerous hazard out there. Rednecks are clannish. My definition of a redneck doesn't have anything to do with race, country music, or region. The bottom line is that a redneck is someone who hates you because you are different than they are. If you don't share their beliefs and values, your life is worth less than a dogs. Really.

Let's say a redneck picks you up to give you a ride after you've been standing in the freezing rain somewhere for five hours. You

really want the ride. A typical redneck will start right off by saying outrageous things to see how you react. Things like " I only picked you up cause you don't look like one of them faggot environmentalists." Maybe you are one of those faggot environmentalists, but don't fall into the redneck's trap. You don't have to lie, just say something like "I'm glad I don't look like those guys."

If you let the redneck draw a distinction between their belief system and yours there is no telling what will happen. Rednecks make themselves obvious by pointing out who they hate and who they think deserves to die. Hitler was a redneck, so is George W. Bush. When you recognize a redneck, it is best to put as much distance between them and yourselves as possible. Even if they seem to think you are okay, they might change their tune when they get drunk and decide to come shoot you.

Redneck tramps are similar to the traditional rednecks except they seem at first to be travelers or hobos and so earn a measure of compassion from you. Redneck tramps usually hang out in groups and are very closed to new people. If you come upon a fire built by redneck tramps there is a good chance that they will beat you and rob you because you are not a part of their group. Redneck tramps usually give away their true nature a little slower than the traditional rednecks but the hate always reveals itself.

Crazies

Crazies are usually harmless, but they are unpredictable. The crazies can be entertaining but unless someone I know can vouch for

them I usually prefer to watch them interact with someone else.

Gang Bangers and Wannabe's

Gang bangers are similar to rednecks in their clannishness but usually aren't as overtly hateful towards entire groups of people. What makes gang bangers dangerous is that they are usually are trying to earn 'respect' from the people around them. 'Respect' basically means that no one messes with them. I believe that most gang bangers become part of a gang because they are essentially powerless by themselves. Gang bangers can be any race and anywhere. They can flip at a moments notice when an outsider violates their ambiguous code of 'respect.'

Wannabe's are even more dangerous than gang bangers because they are usually loose cannons looking for a way to prove that they deserve respect. None of them do, because of the base worthlessness of their character. As a result their actions become more and more outrageous and violent as they attempt to prove they deserve to be a gang banger. I've known friendly bums who have been beaten and killed by stupid kids with low self esteem who simply wannabe part of some stupid gang.

Energy Vampires

Energy vampires are everywhere. The best way to spot them is when they first approach you (they always approach you) and for

some reasons you can't understand, they decide that they want you to be their best friend. If someone wants to be your friend for no apparent reason, they probably are an energy vampire.

Energy vampires like to be the center of conversation. They can draw the life out of any conversation with constant interruptions and meaningless stories that no one wants to hear. If an energy vampire is in your midst, you might notice that the people you want to talk with no longer hang out when you show up with your new best friend who follows you wherever you go.

A lot of energy vampires pose as hippies because real hippies are probably the most likely to let an energy vampire suck off them for an extended period of time. What an energy vampire does is feed off the positive vibes you create in order to get attention that they don't deserve. Along with that they usually hit anyone and everyone up for smokes, food, cash, a place to crash, and whatever else they can get. Learn to recognize them and tell them bluntly that you don't want to be their friend because there is no cure I've seen for an energy vampire except to make them find another victim.

Drugs, Alcohol, and Trippers

I've had great experiences abusing substances. Not everyone can hang with it though. The best advice I can give is to be moderate in all things including a little excess. When you do decide to indulge, three things will help you come through it: 1) know what you are taking and where it came from 2) have someone with you that you trust and 3) if the world turns upside down, preprogram a voice in your head to remind you that whatever you are experiencing is only temporary.

Rough Living
An Urban Survival Manual

Entertainment, Recreation, and Leisure

You've got all the time in the world. What do you want to do with it? So what if you don't have any money….here are a few suggestions….

Parks

Every city I've been to has parks. Parks are wonderful. Sit in a park. Play sports in the park. Read in the park. The park is a place where you are allowed to be without having to pay anything. Except in China where you have to pay to go in the parks. Respect the parks. If you can't think of anything else to do, pick garbage up from around the park.

Sports

I wish I would have discovered sports when I was younger. All you need to run is a pair of shoes. You don't need $100 Nikes. You can use $5 rite aid shoes. Tennis is free in most US parks. A racket will run you a couple of bucks at the thrift store and you can bounce the ball on the wall all day long. There are Frisbee golf courses all over the Northwest; swimming is free if you have a river, lake, or ocean.

Not only that, but sports make you feel good. They make your body strong. They make your life longer.

I'm still not a big fan of watching sports. I can take it or leave it. I prefer movies, but I love playing sports.

Classes

Most cities offer free or cheap classes in all kinds of things. You can get a classin first aid, in CPR, in researching your genealogy. Go to the library and ask about classes.

Libraries

If Ben Franklin were alive I would write him a heartfelt thank you letter for creating the world's first public library. The public library is your gateway to your future. You can study a new career, take classes, watch videos, attend meetings, use the internet, or find out about anything. Ask the research librarian about anything you want to find out and she will love helping you. Be sure to say thanks.

Free Concerts

There are free concerts in malls, parks, and shopping centers. Pick up a local paper and read the events section. Or ask the librarian where to look.

Malls

I never liked malls before going to the Philippines. Think about it though. They are free. They have neat stuff you can play with. Sometimes they have concerts. You can people watch to your hearts content in the mall. You can even escape the heat or cold in the mall.

Malls are fun.

Cheap Movies

Most cities have cheap theatres. In Honolulu it costs you about a buck to watch a movie. In Portland you can watch art films for a couple of bucks and drink beer while you're doing it. There are even fifty cent theatres where you can watch second run films.

Window Shopping

Take a walk through downtown and see what the rich folks are buying. Try not to laugh when you see how useless and expensive some of the items are. I still laugh every time I pass a doggie bakery or doggy boutique. Never mind what I do when I go by Prada or Louis Vitton.

Visiting

Visit some folks you haven't seen in a while. Make some new friends. Sit in the park and chat with a stranger.

Reading

Reading can give you ideas. It can whisk you away to another time and place. It can allow you to discover yourself or live the life of someone else. There are too many people who don't take the time to

read a book because they are working too much, watching too much TV, and wasting their lives on worthless trash.

Learning on your own

Just because you can't afford to go to college doesn't mean you can't get an education. Watch Good Will Hunting if you want to be inspired. Use the library. Learn a language, learn about astronomy, biology, medicine, law, or math.

Scientists say that when people stop learning the dendrites in their brains begin to shrivel up. Autopsies have revealed that Alzheimer's patients have the most shriveled dendrites.

Learn or die.

Staying Positive and Clean

I don't ever need to see another stinky, negative, unclean beggar. There is no need for it. You're not a piece of trash. Don't treat yourself like one. There are plenty of places you can wash up.

If you let yourself look and smell like garbage, you are going to start thinking like garbage. It's a waste. Keep your pride and keep yourself clean.

Showering

All you need to shower is water and a rag. It doesn't hurt to have soap. At the worst do this. Go to a restaurant or public bathroom, lock the door, and use a sponge or washcloth to give yourself a good bath at least every other day.

I shower two or three times a day. Mostly at the park.

There are showers available at the YMCA. Churches and missions will let you shower. There are showers at ports. There are showers in colleges and in many parks. Keep yourself clean. Wash your crotch, your pits, your face, your ass, your arms, legs, hands, and feet. (Not necessarily in that order, I like to start with my face.)

The importance of Hygiene

Hygiene not only keeps you feeling good about yourself, it keeps you healthy. On top of that, it gives you greater access. Remember the three A's? A clean and healthy looking person can go just about

anywhere but a foul smelling bum will get stopped going in the mall, wandering around the campus, and walking in the store.

Using Deodorant

I went through a phase where I refused to use deodorant. “It’s not natural” I would tell people when they told me I should use it. There are natural deodorants available. They are not that expensive. Please use deodorant.

Laundry

Washing your clothes should cost you about $3 to wash and dry a load. You will feel better and smell better. It’s also a nice place to stay warm when it’s cold out or dry when it’s raining.

Clothing

You can buy good clothes at thrift stores. Pay attention to what is currently fashionable for someone your age. Try to blend in and you will have more access to a better life. I know it’s hard to get rid of your Iron Maiden concert shirt, but for goodness sake man, you’re forty five!

Brushing and Shaving

I brush my teeth twice a day. When I wake up and when I go to sleep. I don’t care where I am. I usually have a water bottle and I will spit the toothpaste in the bushes or on the street if I have to. If someone doesn’t like it I will ask them to please smell my breath.

I use an old fashioned shaving brush to lather up my face. I put some soap in it, put some water in it, lather it up, and then use my Trac III razor to shave off my stubble. I have a really tough beard and this combination works best. The Trac III blades last about a month and a half each with care.

Being a bum vs. Being a regular person

Just because you live this way doesn't mean you have to be a wretched bum. If you want to be that, go ahead. You can live in a car, live in the bushes, or live on the street without looking like you are "homeless". People are always surprised when they find out I don't live indoors.

I am a regular person. I just don't have a house or a real job.

Worksheet

The following are some questions you can ask yourself to figure out where you are going or what you want to do. I like to use these questions periodically to check up on myself or to inspire myself to write or learn something…..

1) What is your provocation?

2) What do you need?

3) What are your abilities?

4) What are your accumulations?

5) What kind of access do you have?

6) Who are your major influences?

7) How do you get cash?

8) What do you want?

9) What do you always have?

10) Where do you want to be in a week, month, and year?

I believe that if you write it. It will happen. That's why I know that I'll be a millionaire very soon. Good Luck!

Chris Damitio

About the Author

Chris Damitio is a world-traveling bum that can't hold a decent job. He somehow bumbles and fumbles through amazing adventures in exotic and tropical locations. He is the author of Rough Living Tips and Tales of a Vagabond (First and Second editions) and Slackville Road, his first novel. Currently he is sitting in a late night coffee shop waiting for normal people to go to sleep so they don't notice him sleeping on their front porch.

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